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An Autobiography and Reflections of Life in the Twentieth Century
Nicholas J Ninos

Parents and Being Born
Life Pre World War II

My parents were born in Smyrna Turkey. At that time children of Greek parents were considered to be Greek citizens, even though they were not born as Greek soil. Due to a Turkish uprising, on or about 1915, all Greek people were forced to flee to save their lives. As a result, my father John Ninos, emigrated to the United States. Earlier, his sister, Katha had married and had come to America. She and her husband settled in Lancaster, Pa. Consequently, when my father came to America, he also went to Lancaster.

As far as I could remember while talking to him about his life in Smyrna as a young boy, dad seemed to play the clarinet, and played in the local concert band. He also had hurt his leg as a young boy. It had become infected, and then for a time they thought it should be amputated. Luckily, a local English Dr. took him on as a patient and saved the leg. After that, he walked with a slight limp. He had completed grade school, and then worked in various jobs. He worked on the railroad and also at the local newspaper as a proofreader. When he came to Lancaster he got a job at the local clothing store. After some time he decided to go to New York City, where he got a job in the maintenance department of the Kew-Forest Co. The foreman was Greek and thus dad could communicate. At that time, he could not speak English. His brother Mike (Evangelis) also worked at the same company.

At that time, dad had met other Greeks. A few became fast friends. One, Paul Antonis, would be his best man and my Godfather. His father was musically inclined, since he also played the mandolin. Paul played the guitar. And so, a small combo was formed.

At about 1915, my mother to be, Evangelia (Evie) Spyros, also emigrated with her father Jacob (Yakov) to America. Mom, had been persuaded by her sister, Christa to America. She then married Angelis Valakakis, a barber. They had settled in Brooklyn, N.Y. Her father had a Greek pastry shop in Smyrna and was well to do. Mom had completed grade school and high school known as the "Gymnasium". She could speak Greek, Turkish, French (all educated people could speak French at that time, and Russian. The latter language I did not know about until later. Her sister had married a wealthy Greek businessman who lived in Chios, Kos, etc. As a young girl mom spent her summers at their estate, and probably learned Russian at this time.

Apparently, the Greek foreman also knew the Vassilakis family. He evidently knew of my mother, and introductions followed. My mother knew my father in Smyrna, but since they didn't grow up in the same circles, they had not met formally. Actually, he probably was from the wrong side of the railroad tracks. People were very class-conscious at that time.

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