

## To Quiet Leadership



By Tom Skallas

The cover of the newly re-launched Greek Star apparently caused quite a stir last week. You see, this century-old

Greek American newspaper chose to legitimately explore whether not Greece still matters. You and everyone else knows the answer to that question, of course Greece matters. In fact, all of the contributors of that issue overwhelming proved that Greece does still matter. That type of introspection is honest and healthy for us and forces us to not take anything for granted.

While the overwhelming majority of the feedback was positive, a small, un-silent minority protested that this question was even asked in the first place. Apparently to show that their brand of patriotism is better than that of the oldest Greek-American newspaper in the country. They took to Facebook and in between posts about celebrities, dared to condemn this newspaper for encouraging a lively, intellectual dialogue between it and its readers, something I hope it continues to do.

Normally this type of nonsense doesn't bother me, but this week it stood in such contrast to the actions of my friend Peter Stamatis and his father Sam, that I wanted to share

my thoughts with you. You see Peter and Sam just released their book "Dandelions for Dinner," a project that they have been working on for almost a decade. Their book tells the story of Sam's journey from war-torn Greece to America and the struggles that his family suffered along the way.

Saranti, Sam's real name and how he was called as a child, was like most children who grew up relatively poor in Greece in the 30s and 40s. Playtime was usually interrupted by hunger pains and wondering when the next meal would come. Although Saranti's mother valued education above all, school was usually followed by peddling cigarettes and sweets in the town square so his family could afford to eat that day. Throughout years of war and occupation, Saranti's family held out hope that tomorrow would be better as long as they made it to America. As Saranti's father, Panagioti explained, "Saranti, it saddens me to say that Greece will remain polarized for many years. Strife and turmoil will reign here for a long time. But your future is not here, Saranti. It is in America. All of our futures are in America"

Their story is refreshing as they describe their relatives with brutal honesty rather than simply glorify them. The writing is clear and

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concise as you are transported right next to Saranti while he was growing up in Gargaliani. As I read their story, I thought about my father and his struggles in Greece; how he grew up without his father who died of pneumonia when he was two and how my grandmother raised five children on her own until they too

could come to America. All of us have a similar story that connects us personally and deeply to Greece.

Panagioti's words stuck with me as I reflected on what was happening

in Greece today. While its true that Greece is not at war, hope is lost, just like it was when Saranti was growing up. People are suffering and the poor are wondering where they will get their next meal. Young Greeks are even looking at America as the land of opportunity and we might even see another wave of immigration from Greece. I am grateful to Peter and Sam for reminding me how lucky I am that my father risked everything to come to this country in order to build a better life for our family.

I hope that each of our stories will be preserved for our children and their children, and well, their children. While I would be thrilled if everyone did as Peter and Sam did and wrote a book, I am glad that the National Hellenic Museum is doing

everything they can to preserve these stories. Through the Frank Kamberos Oral History Project, the museum is capturing as many of these stories as possible and I urge you to go to the museum and preserve your family story before its too late.

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I encourage you to pick up a copy of the book at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and come to the National Hellenic Museum of February 23rd, meet Peter and Sam and buy an autographed copy of the book from them while they talk about their story.

*Editor's Note: Tom Skallas is a Chicago native and a Partner at Thompson Coburn LLP where he counsels middle market companies and their owners. Tom serves as a Vice-Chairman of the National Hellenic Museum and the First Vice President of the Hellenic Bar Association. Tom is a passionate Greek American, making it his mission to ensure that as many as possible feel proud to be Greek. You can read more about Tom at [www.thompsoncoburn.com/people/find-a-professional/a-skallas.aspx](http://www.thompsoncoburn.com/people/find-a-professional/a-skallas.aspx)*

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