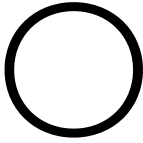


LOOKING TOWARDS OUR CENTENNIAL

Once Upon a Time

By Demetre Fotos

 ur father, who is in heaven, was born in 1891. Dan A. Fotos arrived in New York in 1909 at the age of 18 and worked his way across the U.S. building railroads. He arrived in San Francisco in 1911 where he opened a Second Hand Store five years after the devastating earthquake. He settled in Sacramento in 1916 and in 1917 went off to serve in World War I for which he earned his U.S. citizenship. Arriving back in Sacramento he eventually built the Alhambra Laundry and Fotos Linen Supply. Besides supplying schools and the two air force bases with linen, he supplied the Japanese Camps during World War II. My father's Laundry was also helpful to our Greek community. Whenever someone had a relative arrive from Greece, they would ask my father if he could give them a job. I once met a Priest who told me that my father gave him his first job in the U.S. He was forever grateful. That happened often.

In 1931 my father drove across the U.S. to Cuba in a 1929 Model A Ford to marry his Picture Postcard Wife, Despo. Due to corruption at the U.S. Embassy they were stuck there four months. On the way home while driving through Tampa Florida my mom said she had an uncle that lived there. My father then pulled over to ask the first person he saw if he knew where John Bellas lived. The kid said "Yeah, that's my father". What are the odds?

Upon arriving back in Sacramento my mother was pregnant with Eugene. My father's brother and a friend moved in and along the way my mother bore six kids. She told a Greek lady who was dying that she would take care of her retarded daughter, Georgia. Before long, 12 people were living in our house permanently. There were many who lived with us for a short time. In our huge basement we had five couches that opened up to beds. Our property at 38th street off McKinley was over a half acre. We had about a 4,000 sq. ft. vegetable garden and 17 fruit bearing trees. And 20 fifty gallon barrels of homemade Greek wine. OPA! This all helped to keep the food cost down. Father Kirmitsis would always bring visiting priests to our home for some nourishment. He called our home "The Monastery" because it was open to everyone in the Greek community, morning, noon or night. And even overnight. If my father or brother Eugene would see strangers in church they would invite them to our home for a big Sunday meal. My mother always over cooked, just in case. My father built a 14 foot table in the basement to accommodate the masses. Sometimes Antonia & I had to eat off the bread board.

At our church at 6th and N street, the men sat on the right side of the church and the women and children sat on the left. Mrs. Fantages didn't care what the rules were. Her family sat on the men's side to worship together. She was our "Rosa Parks".

Behind the old church we had an old Victorian house which served as our Sunday school and Greek school. Father Mestakides, sitting on the back porch, would grab my 5 year old body and set me on his lap. He would tell me to turn my head and then would grab the chord in my neck and squeeze. It hurt like heck!

My 9 year old sister Antonia, 7 year old brother Manuel and I would ride the No.1 McKinley bus downtown to 7th and J where Mr. Tony Legatos had his Log Cabin restaurant. We would drop in for a free scoop of ice cream and then walk 5 blocks to Greek school. On the way home it would be dark outside. Can you imagine letting your kids do that today.

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Our church had a reputation for being tough on priests. It was so bad that the Bishop would threaten to send priests to Sacramento if they got out of line. Enter Father Karas (Kirkidis). He was our first modern priest. He started our first youth program & joined in on their activities, like bowling. Our Greek community had a fit. It was unpriestly. And he smoked. One lady spread a lie that she saw him walking down the street jumping over parking meters. He tried to bring discipline to the church. As an altar boy, if our shoes weren't shined, he wouldn't let us serve that day. One Sunday everybody was talking in church. He stopped the service & said in a loud voice, "Where do you think you are, the bazaar!" Father Karas told them to show respect while in church and to be quiet. They didn't. That's when Julia Poulos jumped up and balled out the congregation. Father then said he could not continue the service and left. On another Sunday, a board member thumbed his nose at the priest. Very soon he had a stroke and permanently lost the use of that arm. Poor Father Karas didn't last a year. He ended up on a ship as a Navy Chaplain.

In 1952 Iconographer Theodore Tsavalas resided in our home while he painted the icons in our church. He was my mother's uncle as well as the uncle to Telly Savalas, the actor. Eugene and I would go down to the church to watch him work his. He gave me an old brush and oil paints and at 9 years old I painted my first oil painting. Mr. Tsavalas had a bladder problem. When he was painting the Pantocrator, he spent half the day climbing up and down the very high scaffolding to use the bathroom. Father Kirmitsis gave him a bucket to use up top. Tsavalas said no, it would be a sin so Father Kirmitsis blessed the bucket. Problem solved.

Kyriako Anastasiou was our Psalti and Greek school teacher. He was tough on us in Greek school. He would hit our knuckles with a ruler when we weren't paying attention. That was fine with our parents. One day a beggar came upstairs to ask for help. Anastasiou immediately kept on yelling "GET OUT" while pushing him down two flights of stairs. The poor guy didn't know what hit him. Anastasiou moved to Houston Texas and became a priest. When Eugene ran into him at a convention, he asked him how things were in Houston. "They love me!" He also said he improved the cooking at the local jail and the inmates were very happy. They called him Father Charlie with the Big White Cadillac.

In 1971, Father Raptis had to pick up Bishop Meletios from San Francisco. He borrowed a limo from Culjis Mortuary and asked Eugene to keep him company. On the way to San Francisco he was pulled over for going 100 m.p.h. Father Raptis could not talk the cop out of the ticket. As the cop was beginning to write the ticket Eugene jumped out of the car and yelled "STOP". He got on one knee and raised his hands in a praying position. He said "PLEASE, PLEASE don't give him a ticket. You don't know the Bishop, he's MEAN, REALLY MEAN! He's going to be mad that we're late and when he finds out Father Raptis got a speeding ticket, he'll defrock him! And if he loses his job, he won't be able to feed his family. PLEASE!" In disgust, the cop tore up the ticket. Father Raptis couldn't believe it. He just shook his head and smiled.

I served 9 years as an altar boy and have been singing in our choir for 61 years. What a ride!