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Professor Watkins

English 1A

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*Her Ellada*

Growing up I have always looked up to my *yiayia* (grandmother in Greek). When I am around her, she always leaves an unforgettable impression of herself that I will never forget. My *yiayia* has taught me a lot of things. She taught me how to cook, bake, be polite, clean, be independent, and much more. From learning about her past I learned even more about her. Now I know the reasons why she is who she has become, and how life is not about becoming filthy rich, but really being genuinely happy without the material things. Without the material things in life, what is left to make people happy? For *yiayia* it was not a new pair of shoes or a dress; it was being with her family, her loved ones, that made her extremely joyous. Moving to a new country and leaving her family behind was one of the hardest obstacles in life she had to overcome; I asked her about this rough time in her life. She did not want to talk about it really. *Yiayia* did not want to look back at this long-lasting negative time, because it was a dark, unhappy time in her life. The difficulties she encountered made her stronger, and strengthened her faith in family. Now she has a family of her own that she will never let down or leave, because in the end that is what makes her life worth living.

My *yiayia* grew up with her two younger sisters, Froso and Maria. They lived with both of their parents in Athens, Greece. Being the oldest, *yiayia* was always the caretaker of the family. She was the second mom, learning how to cook and clean at a very young age. She mastered it and probably can cook blindfolded now. While I was asking questions about my

*yiayia's* childhood I could tell that there was so much joy back in her home country Greece. She was talking about it as if she never left. My *yiayia* remembers when she would wake up late in the night and wake up her sisters to take them out of the house. She liked the adventure and adrenaline rush she would get, even though she made sure she would never get caught. My *yiayia* said how all they would do is just roam around the streets of Athens, having a good time. Eating ice cream late at night and dancing around the streets. Moments in her life that seemed so small then, but mean a lot to her now. She had to remember those precious times with her sisters because she had to leave Greece when she was twenty-five. That is around the time she met her husband, my *papou*. They were going to leave to America, the land filled with opportunities! My *yiayia* hated the idea. She did not want to leave her beloved country. She was happy where she was. There was an opportunity at the local church that would send them to America for free, and my *papou* did not want to let it pass by. My *yiayia* of course did not want to be separated from her husband, because they had already started a family. My mom was about three and a half years old when they left Greece. The plan was to only stay in America for about five years just to save some money, and then move back. *Yiayia* did not want to get adjusted to the customs of the American way. "I hated the language. I did not want to learn it, speak it, nothing!" She laughed..." I thought we were going to move back to Greece after five years, but we didn't." (Maridis) Instead what was supposed to be five years turned to be forever. I could sense the sadness in her tone, and I heard how much she really did miss Greece. I was bringing up a time she did not want to go back to. It was rough for her to talk about it, but it helped her expressing what she was going through at the time, because she kept her feelings to herself. This was a time where she could release them.

Language was a huge problem for my *yiayia*. She felt like an out-cast. A lot of the times

she did not want to leave her house because she did not want to face any problems, because the problem was she could not communicate with anyone. "How would you feel if you could not even go to grocery store, because no one can understand you? I felt like an alien. People looked at me funny because I dressed differently, and had an accent. People in America were cold. I was not use to that. In Greece people welcome you from wherever. They treat you like family. In America, if it does not help themselves, then they will not help at all."(Maridis). *Yiayia* did not want to adapt to a place so cold. How could she after living in such a warm loving environment? She did not feel that she needed to learn the language anyway because she assumed that she and her husband were going to stick to the plan, and she was going to move back. After she realized that it was not going to happen, she became depressed. She felt like a prisoner in her home. She had no friends, no close family, and no one could relate to her.

It was not easy living in this foreign country. She was homesick very early on. *Yiayia* was very close to her parents and siblings in Greece. She found herself depressed most of the time because she could not talk to her family as much as she hoped for. She wished she could just walk across the street like she always did to see her mom, or that her sisters could just stop by and say hello. She had to keep her mind busy because she had a family to take care of. She needed to be strong for them. Even her kids were noticing that their mom did not seem happy. My mom said, "I know my mom was sad. I could see it in her eyes every day. She did not care that they were making more money, buying more things, it all did not matter because it did not fill in that hole that was missing. Seeing her family, and moving back is what would fill it in." (Baroudos). *Yiayia* needed to see her family; she needed something that money couldn't buy.

Many years went by, and my *yiayia* had to face the fact that she would never move back to Greece. So she started to learn the language slowly by having her children speak to her in

English. Over time she started to get the hang of it, but she much rather speak in Greek till this day. *Yiayia* did all that she could to make herself happy. By doing that she made sure her kids were happy, and that is what brought her joy. She and her husband both worked hard together to support their family. My *yiayia* did not want to be sad anymore, so she made the best of her new life in America. She made sure that every Sunday the family would go out and spend quality time together after church. It was her favorite day out of the week. It was spending time with her family that she now had in America that made her happy again.

Finally, after thirteen years the family took a trip to Greece. My *yiayia* was never more nervous in her life. "I couldn't believe I was going to see my family again. I did not know when this day was going to come. *Ta xeriamo htenan san giria* ( my hands were shaking like an old lady). When I saw my mother and father I started to cry, I did not even recognize my sisters that were standing right next to them. They even had kids! I could not believe I had missed all these moments. It was one of the saddest and happiest times in my life." (Maridis). She felt right at home again. Everything was how it was when she left. Nothing had changed. The people were still friendly, same neighbors, same love, and warmth. It was her Greece, her family. She did not want her vacation to end, but it had to. "I told myself that I will never again wait that long to see my family. I knew that we probably would never move back to Greece, but I knew that it was my family that brings true joy and laughter to my life. I felt that I had not had that in a long time. It took thirty years for me to be truly happy with my life again." (Maridis). It took so long because it took her awhile to raise her family and then her kids were having kids, and soon she was filled with her kids and her grandkids. A nice big family was her cure for her sadness.

I asked my *yiayia* if she had any regrets, and her answer really surprised me. She said that she wished she never left Greece. Sure, where she lives now is beautiful and she is happy, but

that is because her family is here around her. It took a long time to build her family, but she had a family in Greece, and she wished that she never left them. For her, family was everything and that is what made her truly happy. She made me realize that life should not be how many shoes you have or who has the biggest house. Seems like not only now, but then as well the focus is on image and money. She was telling me how back then even though she did not have a lot growing up she did not need a lot. She had material things in America, but family was the thing that brought her joy. She pointed out on the things that I always need or what I want to my mother and how they are all material things. Really I should be asking to spend more time with family. Family is something much more than any blouse or necklace. Because in the end a pair of shoes does not make you laugh, a shirt does not give you kisses, and pants do not give you lifelong lessons that you will never forget.