

[Contents]

List of Illustrations	viii
List of Abbreviations	x
1. Stalked by Daddy's War: Earliest Memories and How I Came to Face Them	1
2. Recounting Daddy's War: Family Stories	54
3. Analyzing Daddy's War: Insights from Established Theories	178
4. Grappling with Daddy's War: Speculations for Extending Theories	218
5. Cowitnessing to Daddy's War: An (Im)Possible Recital of What Might Have Happened	262
Epilogue: Surviving Daddy's War	336
Acknowledgments	349
Appendix A: A Note on Greek Names and Naming	353
Appendix B: Family Trees	357
Appendix C: Maps	359
Appendix D: "Never Leave the United States"	363
Appendix E: My Grandfather's Wartime File on His Family	369
Appendix F: Chronology	377
Glossary	389
Reference List	391

[Illustrations]

1. The new house on Hawthorne Street 2
2. Unknown Kacandes relatives 11
3. Village wedding of Chrysoúla H. Tsínga and
George J. Kacandes 57
4. Wedding portrait of George and Chrysoúla Kacandes 58
5. George J. Kacandes with unidentified family friend 61
6. Harálabos Tsíngas with Zoé Paphíli and unknown friend 62
7. Asymoúla Tsínga, née Kózari, with her older sister 64
8. Engagement portrait of Chrysoúla and George 68
9. John G. Kacandes, American boy 74
10. George J. Kacandes, dandy 76
11. The house in Chryssó 79
12. Chrysoúla Kacandes and her children 82
13. Sakellaríou, head of the Fourth Police Precinct 85
14. John and Kítsos, the ram, Easter 1945 91
15. View of the *lóngos* from Delphi toward the Corinthian Gulf 93
16. Portrait of Giánnis (John) Tsíngas 108
17. Chrysoúla at her loom with her children 110
18. John Kacandes, μούτσος (ship's boy) 118
19. The Tsínga girls in traditional Greek dress 128
20. The Kacandes children's passport photo, 1945 165
21. John leaves for Pennington Prep 174
22. Chrysoúla and George in Delphi 175

23. Back of photograph found with Chrysoúla's
last will and testament 176
24. Memorial to explosion of *Clan Frazier* battleship 206
25. John with tanks of the 50th Royal Tank Regiment 213
26. John with unidentified members of the 50th RTR 214
27. The Kacandes children's passport, 1937 266
28. Celebrating the Greek national holiday 269
29. John wins first prize in a swimming competition 270
30. Before the school gate, Chatzikonstantínou, Palió Fáliro 272
31. Kacandes children in traditional Greek dress 273
32. Street in front of Kacandes ancestral home 277
33. View of the *lóngos* from Delphi 280
34. Thýmios Tsakírís with George H. Kacandes 283
35. Studio portrait of John 293
36. Talisman given to John 299
37. Military pass and letter of reference 300
38. Members of the A squadron, 50th RTR 305
39. Menélaos Costís 306
40. Friends pictured on grounds of requisitioned
convalescent home 308
41. John with Steve Zévas 309
42. Greek passport, 1945 311
43. George and Chrysoúla with their baby son John 318
44. Studio portrait of Chrysoúla, George, and their son John 320
45. John in his playpen 321
46. Inside of book owned by James Ef. Kakandes 323
47. The three oldest Kacandes girls swimming 333
48. Kóstas Gialelí and Ólga Gialelí, née Tsínga, with Irene 340
49. Panagoúla Zéva, née Tsakíri, with Irene 341
50. Chrysoúla Kapsiáni, née Tsínga, with Giórgios Kapsiánis 342
51. The funeral procession of Panagiouí Kakandé 343



Stalked by Daddy's War

Earliest Memories and How I Came to Face Them

When I was very young I knew things about my father that had no plot, no narrator, no audience. I don't remember being told these things. They were just there, like unwelcome relatives installed for the long haul, sponging off my parents and preventing our family from living completely in the present. They existed with a level of substantiality equal to that of my ancestresses who had thrown themselves off the cliffs of Soúli rather than be taken by the Turks and of my forefathers who had fought the Trojans. Whereas it was easy to want to make room in our crowded house for the heroines and heroes from Greece, it was a lot harder to live with the War Experiences. They took up space, had to be fed and placated. In Their presence one was supposed to be grateful and shut up. They had names like **trapped**, **abandoned**, **cheated**, **terrified**, **betrayed**, and **starved**. And they were barely kept in check by one called **saved**. It's hard for me to imagine that I could articulate the word "**trapped**" as a toddler—and besides, whatever I could say at that age would have been in Greek—but I feel sure I knew what It looked like and that It was living at our new house on Hawthorne Street. Even on moving day, as my older sisters Maria and Tina and I ran in circles from empty living room to dining room to kitchen and back to living



1. Kacandes children at the new house on Hawthorne Street, White Plains, New York, November 25, 1960. Left to right: Tina (Chrysoúla), Georgia, Maria, Irene.

room, They were leering from the corners. At only two years old, I was the slowest, and I was afraid They would reach out for me.

I can't recall exactly when or how these creatures began to accrue details for me. For as in the case of my earliest memories of Their presence, I don't remember being told stories about Them. So for years my father's past occupied part of my brain as barely perceptible vignettes that I would communicate now with something like the following associative word clusters:

trapped-greece-dictator-war
abandoned-streets

cheated-own house
terrified-messages-underground
betrayed-relatives
starved-death
saved-return to america

By the time I could read, the War Experiences began to circulate in my head as mini-narratives of whose relation to each other I was fairly ignorant. I suppose I could have told you that my relatives must have left America before they could have come back to it, but I never stopped to spell that out for myself, because no one ever asked me about it. Even though I believe I had ceased personifying the snippets of story by the time I reached school age—at least I wasn't as worried They would come after me—I was convinced that They still occupied space at our house and had something to do with the desperate way my father consumed food, the ignominy of his verbal castigations, and the capricious threats to take off his belt and beat us. I wondered if They were causing my mother's headaches and afternoon naps. I was pretty sure it was Their fault that we had to stay in the basement when we visited my paternal grandparents in Neptune, New Jersey, even though they had a beautifully furnished home on the first and second floors. We were told we weren't supposed to dirty the upstairs, but being in the basement had the quality of hiding, hiding from the War Experiences, I assumed. At the same time, I knew perfectly well, I wasn't supposed to ask my parents anything about Them. Similarly, I never questioned my three sisters about Them, even though these word clusters contained lots of mysterious and contradictory elements, and my sisters and I comforted and sustained each other by talking about everything else. There was only one place we felt safe and that was the closet in our bedroom—not to be confused with the closet in our parents' bedroom where our father's belts hung. We shut ourselves into our closet individually as needed and as secretly as possible, because if you got caught crying there you could get yelled at or worse.

I suspect that between the ages of about five and ten, I had an idea of the protagonists and basic plots behind Their presence. I will list those here in approximate, chronological order, though they were stored randomly in my consciousness. In trying to recapture here the form of these stories the way I knew I had them in my head as a child, I note immediately that some snippets come out in my father's voice:

Daddy, Yiayia, Aunt Pearl, Uncle Harry, and Uncle Nick went to Greece because Daddy was having trouble in school since his English wasn't so good. Pappou stayed behind to earn money. They got trapped by a dictatorship and the war and couldn't get out. When the war was over, they came back to the United States.

In Greece, Daddy went to a private boarding school that they closed down suddenly when the war broke out. He was wandering the streets of Athens by himself trying to earn money and find Yiayia.

Yiayia got kicked out of her house during the civil war because her brother robbed her. She had no place to go with the kids. They couldn't get money from Pappou. That's why Daddy had to earn money.

They were so hungry. They survived because there were so many dead people that they were always giving out that nice wheat stuff at church.

Daddy's grandparents were starving. One day his grandfather found the place where his grandmother hid the olive oil. He couldn't help himself. He drank so much olive oil he died.

Daddy ran messages for the Greek underground in the mountains because he was just a boy. The Germans didn't suspect him, but it was scary anyway.

When we got back Uncle Nick didn't know what a fork was.

They put me in second grade even though I was fifteen because I couldn't speak English.

We couldn't believe that they were just going to throw away the grass clippings. So we decided to collect the grass and send it to the goats back in the village. I was the one who knew the most English, so I told the guy at the post office what we wanted to do. They put me in the paper. This rich lady called Pappou and said, "I'll send your son to a good Christian school." That's how I ended up at Pennington Prep.

Now that I've reflected on it, it doesn't surprise me that some snippets are in my father's voice. I do have memories of trying to read the yellowed article about my father that appeared in the local Jersey newspaper in October 1945 and that was subsequently framed and hung in my grandparents' house. However, since part of what sticks in my head includes the cause and the consequences of the publication of that article, I am forced to realize that despite having no memory of ever being directly told or of overhearing these things, I must have been present at some recitals of them by my father.

As a consequence of simply growing older, my intellect developing, and having more contact with the outside world, my father's past took on more historical and narrative detail. I have vague recollections that I "explained" to people how my father had suffered, but I can't recall to whom or under what circumstances I would tell his story. I don't think my recitations were ever of the War Experiences as a single chronological tale, but these are all the narrative elements I currently believe I knew then and might have recounted to others as an adolescent:

When my father was young, his mother took him and his siblings back to Greece because he was having trouble in school in the United States. They were trapped by the Metaxás dictatorship and couldn't return to America. The war broke out. They didn't depart Greece until late 1945, and my father swore he would never return.

When the Italians invaded Greece, they closed down his school, and he was turned onto the streets of Athens. He started selling cigarettes. It took a while before he could earn enough money and find his way back to his mother in the village.

When the war broke out, the money his father had been sending couldn't get through any more, so they were really poor. As the oldest sibling, my Dad tried to support the family. He did anything he could to help them survive.

My father was from an area of Greece that was important strategically because it was near the Corinth canal, so there were a lot of Nazis there, and that's where the Greek resistance was born. He ran messages for the underground in the mountains.

My grandmother was thrown out of her own house by her own family. Greece had a terrible civil war.

There was dreadful starvation in Greece because of the particular timing of the start of the war. The harvest didn't come in, and the Greeks ate the grain, so there was nothing to plant the next season. My father watched his own grandparents starve to death.

So many people died and on such a regular basis that there were continual memorial services for the dead in the churches; my father and his siblings would go to every one so that they could eat the kolyva, the boiled wheat that is handed out to commemorate the dead. They would have starved without it.

When they got back to the United States none of them could speak English, and they didn't know how to use silverware, it had been so long since they had seen any.

There was an article about my father in the local paper, and a wealthy woman from Ocean Grove saw it and contacted my grandfather, saying that if his son were really serious about learning English, she would sponsor him at a private school. That's how he ended up at Pennington Prep and made it to Cornell University. He was the first person in his family to go to college.

My dad's war experiences were so terrible he swore he would never go back to Greece, and so far he hasn't.

To be sure, additional anecdotes were added to my pool of knowledge as events of varying importance occurred in the family. When my paternal grandfather died unexpectedly of a heart attack at age sixty-five on July 4, 1970, I was just twelve years old. But I remember well the brusque way in which my father threw us (now) six kids into the station wagon and the silence in which we made the long drive from Johnson City, New York, where we were visiting Uncle Alex, my mother's brother, and his family, to the Jersey Shore, where most of my father's family still lived. As is Greek Orthodox custom, there was an open casket at the funeral. My handsome grandfather lay there impeccably dressed and elegantly posed, but his skin didn't look right and his eyes were shut. I remember

my grandmother screaming out to her dead husband over and over again throughout the church service: Γιώργιο, άνοιξε τα μάτια σου, άνοιξε τα μάτια σου! (George, open your eyes, open your eyes!) But most of all, I remember the stony monolith of my own still father, brooding at the periphery of my vision.

At some point in the days and months that followed my grandfather's death, two stories related to the War Experiences were whispered about and reached my ears. Someone recalled how my father was so upset with his own father when they got back from Greece in 1945 that he refused to address him with Μπαμπά (Dad) or even Πατέρα (Father), referring to him only as μπάρμπα, meaning literally "uncle," and often used to address any male older than oneself, related or not. I don't remember if I risked a direct question, but when my father's extreme moroseness in the wake of his father's death continued, my mother explained to me how sad he was that he had never had a chance to make it up with his father and that now it was too late. Furthermore, I learned that when my father went through his father's papers, he had found a bundle of letters that my grandfather had sent to the Red Cross and the State Department during the war, trying to locate his family. Until finding that correspondence, my mother explained to me, my father had believed that his father had simply **abandoned** them.

Autumn 1972 I was supposed to begin learning a foreign language. I decided to study German. I remember my motivation clearly: I wanted to do something different from my older two sisters, who had been excelling in French. German was being offered in our school system for the first time since it had been canceled during the First World War, and the teacher was a young, beautiful, tall, blond, blue-eyed German American woman. She let us call her "Frau" for short since her last name, von Burchard, was a mouthful—or maybe she just didn't want to hear us butchering its pronunciation. That same fall, the American Field Service decided to send my sister Maria, the oldest of us six siblings, to Hamburg, Germany. This foiled my plan to distinguish myself, but I continued

with German anyway. My father didn't say a negative thing about either of his daughters' immersion into things German, and at some point, I realized that this was quite to his credit given his past. When I wanted to praise my father in the years that followed, especially to point out his open-mindedness, I would say:

Despite my father's war experiences he never got upset when I decided to study German or when my sister was sent to Germany as an AFS exchange student.

In fact, close relations quickly developed between all the members of Maria's host family, the Thiels, and my own, including among our parents, the War Generation.

In the summer of 1974 my mother took me and my younger sister, Georgia, to Greece. It was our first trip. We stayed for two months and traveled, among many other places, to Roúmeli, the area of mainland Greece where my father's family was from. While I remember being wowed by the countryside, especially by the ruggedness of Mount Parnassós, and being impressed by what good sense the idea of the Greek gods made in a place like Delphi, I don't remember feeling the presence of Daddy's War, except maybe a little during the suffocatingly hot night we spent in Chryssó, just below Delphi, in a mosquito-filled room at Theia Loukía's, my maternal grandmother's younger sister's house. She's a little crazy, my mother cooed to Georgia and me. Just be patient and polite. Looking back on it now, the significance of this trip lay not in my relationship to the War Experiences, but mostly in my realization that I wasn't as Greek as I thought I was, which in turn spurred my determination to learn the language properly, so that four-year-olds couldn't talk circles around me like they did in Gávrio, the village where my mother was born and where we spent most of that summer, on the Cycladic island of Ándros.

I did in fact become literate in Greek and made many subsequent trips to Greece, including one in 1984 when Daddy's War jumped out and grabbed me by surprise. I had already studied for one year on a Fulbright

scholarship at the Aristotle University in Thessaloníki and had started a PhD program at Harvard in comparative literature, in order, among other things, to continue my study of Greek. Not only were my Greek language skills at their best, but I was finally comfortable with my double identity as someone who had grown up in the United States and simultaneously embraced her Greek heritage. I was taking a car tour with two of my maternal grandmother's cousins, Theio Níko and Theia Eléni, my mother, and one of her nephews, my first (maternal) cousin Nick, Uncle Alex's first boy, when we decided it would not be too much of a detour to go to the village in which my paternal grandfather had been born, Kolopetinítsa. Despite my trip to the region ten years earlier and my general interest in Greece and our family, I had never gone to this village. It felt like any connection we might have had to it had died with my grandfather, and even that connection was extremely weak. I couldn't recall ever having heard him talk about his natal village or the members of his family who had stayed in Greece, except for the occasion he refused to dance at my cousin Ted's baptism, because his sister—he had a sister?—had just died.

The only times I ever thought about this place were when I was explaining to someone the strangeness of our last name, and that anyone called Kacandes was sure to be from this village and was definitely related to me. When I was studying in Greece and would be asked about my origins, native Greeks would usually laugh and query: are you sure it's Kolopetinítsa? Confused and embarrassed and suddenly not at all sure, I would answer feebly, yes. One day someone finally explained to me that referring to "Kolopetinítsa" is like saying "Hicksville" or "Podunk" in English. Someone had made a kooky comedy called *Vacation in Kolopetinítsa*; though the movie didn't have anything to do with our ancestral village, the name serves as a cipher for the place that is the butt of all jokes about backwardness. Most Greeks don't realize there is a village that actually bears this name. The villagers even had the name changed to Tritéa to avoid the harassment.