

ZOI

When my grandparents emigrated from Greece, we became hyphens between Greek and American culture, adding and subtracting American-ness and Greek-ness ad infinitum. Counteracting the erosion of self that arises from being caught between two cultures, I photograph to understand the profound impact of my heritage on my identity.

For years I photographed in Mexico, Nicaragua and Cameroon, recording and living life in remote villages: the negotiations and interactions of individuals surviving with little or no resources. But when I arrived at my grandmother's birthplace, Lesvos, an island in the north of Greece near Turkey, I connected my pattern of working and the compulsion for doing it, to Greece and family.

In the aftermath of my father's death, I came to understand my romantic attachment to the organic realness of my grandparents' existence in a rural, pre-industrial, isolated village. I had accepted qualities of their village culture circa 1910 as the counterpoint I sought to my own life in an urbanized North American town. Every year I travelled to remote, tight-knit communities with no electricity or running water, that replicated my grandparents' lifestyle in the country of my family's origin.

I photograph to connect with people. The resulting images are secondary to the personal relationships that I form with my subjects. In Greece, the familiar faces of the 'Wild Greeks,' as my father referred to our people, surround me. In conversation, they scream not from anger, but passion. Hospitality and friendship to strangers is considered a virtue. We witnessed this philoxenia when the Greeks, living through their sixth year of a brutal and unrelenting economic depression, helped thousands of refugees that landed on their shores. While in Greece, my sense of place and of self becomes more reconciled, no longer adding or subtracting one identity from another. Because there is no story without conflict, my photographs offer some resolution to this central struggle.

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