

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Greek Impact on Campbell, Ohio Project

Personal Experiences

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MICHAEL MAILLIS

Interviewed

by

Wilfredo Rivera

on

November 11, 1980

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MICHAEL MAILLIS

INTERVIEWER: Wilfredo Rivera

SUBJECT: dowry, alienation, culture shock, interracial marriages

DATE: November 11, 1980

R: This is an interview with Mr. Mike Maillis for the Youngstown State University Greek Impact on the Community of Campbell Project, by Wilfredo Rivera, at 295 Sanderson Avenue, Campbell, Ohio, on November 11, 1980, at approximately 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Maillis, can you tell me something about your background starting with your childhood and working up to the present status?

M: I guess I should start with my parents. My parents were both born in Greece. They met there; they grew up together, and they were married there. Soon after they immigrated to the United States I was born. I was really part of a Greek society. I didn't really become part of the American society until I was of school age because the only people that I ever came in contact with were Greek people, my relatives, grandparents. The first language that I naturally spoke was Greek because that was the language that my parents spoke. As I grew up, my mother was a very religious lady so I guess you can say I had a fairly religious background. Religion was stressed in my household. We went to church every Sunday. It was more than just going to church; it was taking part in all the ceremonies and all the laws of the church. My mother watched over us very carefully that we didn't stray away from these laws. Education was also stressed in our household, being that my father was a working class person. He was an industrial painter, more specifically a bridge painter. Having come from a society where status within the society was very important, the only way that you could move up in that society was by being educated. It was sort of an obsession with him to have someone from his family make it to that social status. He always pushed me to

go to school. I think it was more his dream than it was mine.

Athletics, they were stressed but my parents always put more importance on education than anything. I used to come home from school and I would have to tell them everything that we covered in school, although they didn't speak English; they tried and I think as a result of my studies they learned a little bit of English trying to read my books and trying to ask me questions to see that I knew my lessons for the day. As years went by I developed education skills which helped me later on in life and helped me get to where I am at today.

I have two sisters and a younger brother. I guess I should tell you a little bit about my earlier childhood. When I was five years old my parents decided to try to move to Greece. We moved to Greece; we went there by boat, which was something of an experience for a five year old to cross the Atlantic Ocean on a ship, to never see land for thirteen days. It was quite a learning experience and I would never replace it. I would hope that I could someday take one of my children because the countries that you see once you arrive in Europe and people that you meet are quite a learning experience. Once we got to Greece it was a completely different world for me. Although I was brought up in a Greek household, eating Greek food, speaking the Greek language, going to the Greek church, I was still in the United States. By then I had learned very good English; I was in school; I was into the first grade. I had made friends here and it was quite a shock to be taken from the United States and taken back to Greece. Greece in 1964 was quite different than Greece in 1980. In fact, it was at least forty years behind what the United States was at the time. I was one of the only children on this island who had ever seen an airplane, who had ever done things that I had done, ridden on a bus, because there were no buses on this island; it was a small island. I watched television before, because television had not yet arrived on the island. It was something different because everyone considered me some type of genius because I could tell all my friends of these different things that I had seen in the United States and different toys that we had. To them it was something out of Flash Gordon. It was hard to conceive because they still lived the life of simplicity. They could not imagine this. This life of simplicity, though, was also a learning experience for me because I was brought back at the time into a slower pace and into another society. We spent three years in Greece and I went to three years of school there. I learned the Greek language very well and I got to make a lot of good, Greek friends. After three years I was more Greek or Kalymnian than anything else. I had completely forgotten my English because I hadn't spoken English for almost two years. My sisters were younger than I so they had forgotten it. My brother had not yet been born. My parents didn't have good English as it was, so when

they were back in their homeland they didn't try much to speak English there; there was no need for it.

After three years my parents decided to move back because my father's business ventures didn't go as expected. So here we are again brought back to the United States and it was another culture shock. The United States had changed even more, more than I had remembered. The people that I remembered had grown up and I didn't recognize them. I had grown up. I had to learn English over again. I started making new friends. I was now a different age. It was really interesting. I really enjoyed that period of my life. Although I knew what was going on around me, I couldn't understand what was going on around me. I considered it a challenge to learn English again and to start to compete with the other kids in school as far as education and as far as athletics. I went to Penhale Elementary School where I met a lot of good friends there. I started living the life of an American. I started playing baseball, football, and basketball, all the American sports. I forgot about soccer, the sport that I had learned while I was growing up in Greece. School went well as usual, largely due to my parents pushing me all the time to study and study.

After grade school I went to Campbell Memorial High School where, again, due to my parents, I enrolled into the college preparatory course. I had to study hard and I had to perform and prove to them that I could do something in school. I didn't engage in that many sports in high school. I played some baseball, but I found it difficult to have the determination in two areas. Some people have determination in athletics; they can devote all their time and all their thinking and all their mental capabilities to that sport and excel in it. Other people can apply their time into education and excel in it, and some people can apply their time in both. I was one of those kind that could only apply it in one, and as I mentioned before, that area was education.

Before I graduated high school the decision that faces almost every other high school graduate came upon me, and that was what to do with my life, what type of career to choose, where to go, what schools to go to, should I stay in town, should I get out of town. I really was confused. At the time there was a big technological revolution going on. Everyone was talking technology. Technological fields were going to be the fields of the future. Technical fields were where the money was going to be, so I rapidly chose mechanical engineering as my major. My idea of a mechanical engineer was someone working for Mario Andretti's pit crew and designing racing engines. That is what I went in to at school. Due to my ability to study, I did quite well in school and I finished in time and got my bachelor in engineering. I am now working as an

engineer for the B. F. Goodrich Company.

R: Mr. Maillis, can you tell me something about your parents presently and the structure that exists in your family?

M: My parents are different people. The structure of my family is different than what the average American is used to. My father is the dominant figure; there is no doubt in anyone's mind who the dominant figure is in my household. My mother played the role of the typical female. She listened to what my father said. She didn't work; she was just a housewife. My father brings home the paycheck and my mother does the shopping and saves a little bit of money. She distributes all the other chores among all the other children to help her out at home. My older sister, who is younger than I, married. She is twenty-one years old. She is married and has two children. Her husband is a painting contractor. They live in the same city we do and they have a good life financially and emotionally.

My other sister is twenty and she is still living at home. She has gone to school, but dropped here and there. She goes back and forth and changes jobs. She is still in a state of confusion about her life. She really doesn't know what she wants to do yet. My youngest brother is fifteen. He excels in athletics more than I did myself, but he is not as much into education as I am, although my parents push him. He doesn't respond to them as much as I did. He sort of wants to shy away from this. Right now the main topic when you walk into my parents house is my brother to study. They are always arguing about that. I guess overall you can say I have a fairly happy family. They have their spats like any other family; they have their ups and downs. My father is a very hard worker. He is fifty years old and he is still working the job he has been working since he was twenty-three. He still climbs bridges and paints all day. It is a very tiring life, but that is the life he chose and fate sort of put him there. In World War II, while he was growing up he didn't have much of a chance to be educated, so when he came to the United States he had to work the quickest job he could find, and at the time that was painting bridges where they paid enough money to make any kind of living. Yet, that didn't require many basic skills such as education or prior training. He travels all around the country and has been doing so all of his career, partly because that is where all the work is. There is not very much work in the immediate area. He is always traveling out somewhere south in the winter so he can work in the good weather. He has seen the entire United States just about due to his occupation. I worked the same occupation as my father when I was in school and I think the reason why he made me do that was so that I could appreciate education even more to see how he suffered every day and the type of living that he had to earn, how he had to sweat for his money

so that I could appreciate all his yelling and screaming for me to study and all the arguments that we had, so that I would want to make something better for myself than just a common laborer. He has a dream in his life and we hear about it all the time. I hope that all of us together can help him achieve it, and that is for him to get a nice, big boat, about thirty feet long, and head back to the islands from which he came once he has set up all of his children and set them on some type of course in their lives. He would like to go back and just fish and relax and live out the rest of his years the way that he has always been dreaming about living.

- R: Mr. Maillis, you mentioned that your father climbed bridges. What exactly do you mean by that? Is that something that is common among the Greek people?
- M: It is very common among the Greek people. As a matter of fact, it is about one of the only things that the Greek people here in Campbell, Ohio do. They are either contractors or they're just working. What I mean by climbing bridges is exactly that. They paint steel structures such as bridges which cross large bodies of water like the Ohio River, the Mississippi River. They hang scaffolding underneath them to get the bottom parts, and they literally climb the cables and the overhead beams so that they can paint them. Day in and day out they're putting up some kind of rake so they can get up to the top of the bridge and paint and work their way down. Besides bridges they also paint high tension towers, high voltage towers that carry power from city to city. He has painted from fifty feet high to a thousand feet high. He has painted towers in all of those ranges, both my father and my uncles, which are all his brothers. As I said before, this is a common trade among the Greek people in Campbell. Some of them which were more business oriented have gone beyond the working class of this and saved some of their money and gone ahead and ventured into contracting their own work and having other people work for them. Most of them have been very successful now. They are fairly successful businessmen for having been uneducated people and having come to another country where there is another society, language, and they have no education. They are now top citizens in that society and they are making a lot more money than most of the people that were born and raised in this society, and in this city. That is something that works both for them and against them because it creates some envy among the other more native Campbellites. I think that drive to succeed, that need to succeed is a typical trait of the Greek people. I think largely that comes from the way the Greek society was centered a few years ago when Greece was a monarchy. Kalymnians especially stressed this need because there are a lot of doctors, lawyers, engineers which come from Kalymnian families, and as well as successful businessmen. In Campbell there aren't very many, if any, Kalymnians who are below the middle class of the American society. Their

main goal in life is to succeed. They believe this and it is inbred into their children that they must become something better than their parents. If they don't become something better than their parents then, they failed in life; that is their philosophy.

R: What does an individual, a Greek individual coming from Athens or Kalymnos to Campbell and only speaking Greek and going through the cultural shock experience and going through the process of alienation, are there any services offered in Campbell which will help the individual adjust to the community at a much quicker pace?

M: There are no structured services as such, but due to the strong cohesiveness of the Greek society and the Greek people, everyone helps the other, especially now since there are so many Greeks in Campbell. There are so many related to each other, and successful. It is very hard for them to feel alienated. They always find someone from back home. After all, the island of Kalymnos, it only has a population of 15,000 people. Every year the people migrate to the United States from this island, so you're always seeing someone from the same place, the same village. They never really feel like they are strangers. The other people take care of them. This works against some of the Greek people, especially the women, who are not out in society as much as the men are. The Greek women, when they arrive to the United States, most of them never find a need to learn English. They go to a city where the population is from the same country, speak the same language. The Greek people still hold that custom; everyone speaks the language; it is very important. It is a sense of identity. Although the Greek people love this country, they don't want to become part of the conglomerate of this country as such. They interact with all the people; they're patriotic, but they don't want to just become that. They are Greek-Americans; they never want to lose that identity. It is very important to them to know who they are, what they are, because they're proud of what they are.

R: I understand that the church in Campbell plays a very important role in trying to alleviate some of the stress on newcoming Greeks. What kind of services are offered by the church, and does it still exist today?

M: The church, in a sense, is where they all meet; that is their bond in this country. If you go to Greece, it is not as strong, although the people are religious people. They have no need to have a common bond. They have the common bond that they all live on the same island and they all speak the same language. As a result, that causes more alienation among each other because of different human factors, jealousy and deceit. Here in the United States they know that they

are strangers. They are living in a country of people that are strangers to them. Their friends and their relatives are the people from their island, so it does not make sense for them to be alienated or to fight or to argue. Their social life revolves around the church. There is always a Greek dance; Greeks are very high-spirited people. They make a holiday out of everything, The Greek church is a colorful church and it is a colorful religion. They are explicit in their ways of worship, their ceremonies. For instance, at Easter for the resurrection of Christ they are outside, not inside the church. The service is held outside and there are fireworks to represent the resurrection of the Lord. For Good Friday there was a tomb, an epitaph filled and decorated with flowers and candles. The people have a procession outside of the church as if it is a funeral procession for Jesus. The people actually weep and cry. The church provides services such as Greek school for the children born in this country so that they can maintain the Greek language. We're not living in Greece so there are marriages of Greek people and non-Greek people. It is kind of difficult to develop Greek as well as I did when a child is growing up in an English-speaking household. March 25th is Greek Independence Day and we have plays and celebrations. Children learn entire plays. The children are taught poems, patriotic poems, and plays. They dress up in Greek costumes of that era and we put on plays for the parents. After all this, the night is topped off by a dance, music, drinking, and dancing.

Another service that they provide is a Women's Society. It is in the church. The women have bake sales to raise money for different organizations. There is a Greek orphanage in New York, so the Women's Society along with the Men's Society, they are always trying to raise money so that they can help keep this orphanage. This orphanage is funded by Greek churches all over the United States.

Another service that the church provides is Sunday school. This enables the children to understand the religion, so they know what their religion is about. On Sundays when the church starts a little earlier, the priest talks to the children; they're sent downstairs to the classrooms and then he continues with the liturgy. Towards the end of the liturgy, the children are brought upstairs. Our liturgy is long; it is a three hour service. We don't have a series of short services that you can choose from; you have a choice of one from 9:00 until 12:00.

The church always provided field trips for the children. We would always go to Cedar Point. Another service for the children is the youth clubs, such as GOYA. They would interact with other Greek children from other cities and hold parties and meetings. All this was provided by the church.

- R: I want to touch on some of the customs that prevail in Campbell today. Were these customs brought over from Greece and do they still exist today?
- M: All through Holy Week there are Greek customs. It is an Orthodox custom. During this time all of Jesus' trials and tribulations are acted out by the priest. Also there is the Greek Independence Day custom. Weddings are a little bit different because they are a mixture of both Greek and American customs. It is inevitable that when you are in one society you are going to develop customs from this society, such things as walking down the aisle and having bridesmaids and bridegrooms and throwing the garter and the bouquet. These are not Greek customs. In Greece the weddings are simple. The best man escorts the bride and also the bride's father. The maid of honor and another woman escort the groom. They are brought up in front of the priest and the service is conducted. Everyone throws rice and they go to a location and celebrate.

Since I touched on the wedding I should explain some of the background of the marriage itself. In Greece in older times most marriages were fixed up by parents. It was not necessarily arranged where the bride and groom never saw each other, but if they liked the family, they would come to a mutual agreement and introduce the children. Most of the time they would leave it up to the children's discretion, although it didn't always work that way. Sometimes it worked for the benefit of the couple, sometimes against them. The bride usually provides a dowry because in the Greek society being that the man is the dominant figure, the man is a brethern. When a family loses a man, they lose a breadwinner. It's not like the American society where when a man reaches eighteen years old he moves out on his own and takes care of himself. In the Greek society the man does not leave the house until he is married. As long as he is single and living in this house, he is supporting the house. The Greek family works like a small business. Everyone carries everyone else's weight. When the family loses a woman, they lose a mouth. When a man is about to get married, his family usually requests a dowry as compensation for losing him, although it goes to the couple themselves. Being that the Greek family is so close-knit, what belongs to one belongs to the others. The Greeks are very honorable people. Honor is the most important thing; if you take away a Greek person's honor, you might as well take away his life.

I've been talking about the men in the Greek society so I guess I should talk about the women. The women are usually excellent cooks because they're domesticated and that's their life. The Greek varies from different parts of the country. Island people are seafood people because that is what is naturally available. They cook a lot of vegetables.

Greek food is oil based because of the abundance of olives. As a result, there is a higher rate of heart disease among people in Greece.

Another thing that the Greeks use to celebrate are name days. Everyone has a name day and that goes back to the church again. Your name day is the name of a saint. Once a year everyone has a name day. They have a big celebration and it is your day.

- R: Realizing that the Greek people are very cohesive in Greece and in Campbell also, I understand that the topic of interracial marriage is taboo. Can you please elaborate on the topic? Can you give me some of your personal opinion on how the people of Campbell feel about the topic?
- M: Greek people are not prejudice people, yet they look down on interracial marriages. They look down upon them because of the social effects it has on the family and child and people. Everyone would look down on that marriage, especially the Greek people. They were never confronted with this problem until they came to the United States. Most Americans knew that this problem existed for years. They knew that their children might fall in love with someone of another race. The Greek people knew no one but Greeks. Any time something is new for people, it is hard for them to imagine. This is not prejudice; it is more like a sort of pride in themselves. They see some traits in other people that they don't see in themselves. I mentioned earlier that they're very aggressive people; they're very success oriented. Greek people look down on anyone who is not a go-getter in life, who is not after some type of goal in life. If they see a person who is that type, they don't want their children to marry them. A person is judged by his goals in life. The more goals that you have in life, honest goals, the better person you are in their eyes.
- R: Realizing our present situation in Campbell with regards to the layoff of employees from Youngstown Sheet & Tube, Campbell Works, and J&L, what is your opinion of this? Will the Greek people in Campbell have a tendency to pack their bags and leave, or will they just fight to the bitter end until they find something better?
- M: Eighty-five percent of the Greeks in Campbell have nothing to do with the steel industry. They are all involved with this painting business that we were talking about earlier. The painting business is state funded and it's going strong. Like I said, the Greek people are hustling people; they are out of their house six months out of the year. The men are missing from their home so they can go and bring in the bread. As far as the steel mills closing down, it has affected some

of the Greek people, but they have that other trade to fall back on. They don't really suffer economically because a painter's wages are much more than a steelworker's wage. As far as them moving from here, I seriously doubt that they would move. This is like their second home. If they do move anywhere, they will move to another type of city which is the same as Campbell, such as Tarpon Springs, Florida, where there is a large majority of Kalyrnians. They will go somewhere where there will be a lot of Greeks. Greeks are not loners; they are always with people. They have large families; they have a lot of relatives; they just don't like the idea of being alone. To pick up and go somewhere because the job is there, I doubt it. They will go somewhere first and stick it out until they find a job.

R: One final question Mr. Maillis, have you been to Greece?

M: Yes, I've been to Greece five times. I have spent summers there with my parents. In 1978 and 1979 I spent the entire summer and I am presently planning a trip this year. As a matter of fact, I'm putting together planning a trip this year. As a matter of fact, I'm putting together a group of people, non-Greeks, to take them to Greece, to show them the Greek sites. I do plan on going back to Greece, and I hopefully plan on going there the rest of my life.

R: Are there any other social factors than the ones we've mentioned that may affect the social structure within Greek people in Campbell today?

M: The only social problems or effects that may affect the strength of the Greek people is non-Greek marriages. The people believe that. When two young people are married and they're both from a Greek family and their parents know each other, even if those people disliked each other before that, they will now become family. They will start doing things together. The union between the men and the two children will bring together the two families, and thus create a stronger bond and a stronger kinship in that family, thus creating a stronger Greek society. Most people who are not ethnic oriented are losing contact with the nuclear family. They lose contact with their own children, so how can anyone expect them to be close with their child's in-laws? If these marriages keep taking place, eventually there will be no strong Greek society or a strong Greek bond.

R: Thank you, Mr. Maillis.

END OF INTERVIEW