

"1967"

After graduating from Amherst College in 1960 with a major in philosophy, I had problems attending Albany Law School and the University of Michigan Law School because I had mixed feelings about becoming a lawyer. After working as a substitute teacher, as a claims adjuster, and as a personnel management trainee, I decided in March 1967 to escape from it all by taking my turn at seeing the world and finding myself. I signed up for an Amherst College alumni flight to Rome and Paris: Two weeks later, I gave up my return ticket in order to hitchhike across Europe with a backpack and an American flag. Arthur Frommer's guidebook, "Europe on \$5 a Day", directed me to youth hostels in places like "Paris, London, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, Berlin, Vienna, Venice, Naples, and Athens. My ultimate goal was to see Greece and meet my relatives in both Athens and our ancestral village on the Island of Kefalonia in the Ionian Sea.

On April 21, 1967, while in London listening to speakers at Speakers Corner, I was shocked to learn that a junta of military officers had imprisoned Greece's elected political leaders and had abolished democracy and human rights in the land of my ancestors. Among the incarcerated were political leaders Mikis Theodorakis and Andreas Papandreou with whom I later developed personal relationships after their release from prison. It was through this experience of living under tyranny for one year from August 1967 through August 1968 that my political consciousness was raised, and which gave powerful direction to my life in the succeeding years.

Upon my return to the United States, I commuted to Western New England College three nights a week to complete my legal education, and the United States support for the military junta in Greece became a driving issue in my life. I relentlessly lobbied Congress and worked with the American Committee for Democracy and Freedom in Greece, trying to alter American foreign policy in Greece. This cause and the people I worked with during this period, mostly in New York City, became a major force in my life.

In the spring of 1970, I joined a group of Amherst College undergraduates in expressing our protest and indignation regarding a proposed Amherst College tourist flight to Greece. This was an outrage at a time when there was a world-wide tourist boycott in opposition to the military dictatorship. I felt betrayed by both my country and my college, neither of which seemed to comprehend the horror of what had been perpetrated upon Greece, both of them pursuing what was pleasant and convenient, oblivious to the strife in the country where democracy was founded. As a result, it was difficult to think of America as the land of the free and the home of the brave.

As Americans, we have been programmed to believe that our country is the "land of the free and the home of the brave". And we have also been programmed to "stand beside her and guide her through the night with the light from above".

On November 24, 1999, President William Clinton sought to heal old wounds by offering an apology to the People of Greece for our nation's support of the military dictatorship that overthrew the elected government of Greece and by acknowledging that the United States failed "its obligation to support democracy" when it backed Greece's harsh military junta from 1967 to 1974. However, the "old wounds" are still there and it is still difficult to think of America as the land of the free or the home of the brave.

— *Peter, Albany*