

THE BALLAS STORY

A Dream for a Better Life

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By Jeff Ballas

A proud member of The Ballas Family.
Great-grandson of Demetrius John Ballas,
Grandson of John Demetrius Ballas, Son of James John Ballas.

First Edition

Dedication

I dedicate this book to all the family; both living and dead. I especially want to dedicate it to the current youngest generation of the Ballas family. Boys and girls of this generation are Old Demetrius' great-great -great grandchildren which now includes Beth Anne's (my niece) three young boys, Lucas age 10, Andrew age 7, and Matthew age 5.

I can only hope that someday these youngest members of our family will read this story and enjoy it. When someone asks them if they know their family heritage and nationality, they can boast that they know who their ancestors were and where they came from, and that they proudly have Greek blood running through their veins!

Introduction

Have you ever seen a reality show in which long lost relatives are reunited? Have you ever heard stories how an adopted child finally got to meet his or her biological parent(s), or ever been witness to someone meeting a brother or sister for the first time? These tearful reunions are extremely heartwarming and can soften even the hardest of hearts. Stories such as these have such an impact on us all because their underlying theme reveals the basic human need to know who we are, where we came from, and to understand why we look and act as we do.

It is my attempt in writing *The Ballas Story* to give us some insight into those basic questions about ourselves and to chronicle the challenges that courageous member of our family met when they left their homes to find a better life for themselves and their families.

We will meet family members in this story who took a huge risk when they left their homes to migrate to a new country. Through their stories and a glimpse of what they were like, we may also discover things about ourselves such as, from where did we get our personality traits, from who did some of us inherit our outgoing personalities and entrepreneurial spirit, do some of us even look "Greek" (and, do all the Ballas men have skinny legs), and why were some of us born in America, some in Greece and some in Australia.

I also decided to write *The Ballas Story* because I believe knowing information about one's family background and heritage is important and adds a layer of depth to one's life. Many facets of this story may appeal to those who enjoy history, genealogy, and just a good yarn. When I share some things about our family with friends and acquaintances, they are genuinely interested. Their interest accelerates when I tell them I have a Greek heritage, my Grandfather came to the United States as a young boy, he was one of eight brothers, I have over 50 cousins in Australia, and I have English speaking relatives now living in Greece.

This story may not be the most fascinating or unique tale ever told; but it is our story and it makes me proud to be a Ballas. I wrote this story from my heart. At first, I tried to write it as a third party observer but I struggled to keep it real, meaningful, and passionate. I then switched to telling *The Ballas Story* from my perspective using the first person narrative, and in doing so I know I run the risk of making it sound like my story. It is not just my story; it is our story-*The Ballas Story*.

I want to take this time to apologize profusely to any family member that I have slighted or have put in a bad light. It was not my intention to do so. I have had to piece together stories from many family members who have passed on, and from stories I remember from years

ago. Of course, I have more information about our family in America than I do of those in Greece and Australia so it may appear slanted toward the Americans. Again, I am sorry if it bothers anyone.

To cover some of my shortcomings, I wish that you would consider this as a 1st edition of *The Ballas Story*. I welcome anyone in the family to add to this story (especially those from Greece and Australia), perhaps in additional, future editions. Let me know, and we can work together on it. I will dedicate myself to keep working on our story until I am too old and tired, too senile, or just plain dead. I encourage all of you to help me make this story a living, breathing composition that expands in length as our family grows in number.

Prologue

Through Chicken Comes Love

I was really glad when the neighbor lady came by to say hello to Uncle Christos and Auntie Forta. She had just returned from a trip to Canada; and she spoke English. After she greeted my uncle and auntie, I explained to her if she had not come to my rescue I would soon be sprouting chicken feathers! At the time, I was just out of college and was on a pack-packing trip through Europe and found my way to Greece. I knew I had relatives in Greece and took the opportunity to visit them. It was at the home of my Great Uncle Christos, my grandfather's brother, where I encountered the rather peculiar situation which the neighbor lady helped rectify.

Christos and his wife, Forta, lived in Greece all their lives and did not speak a word of English. Christos knew who I was because I brought pictures of family back in America to show him. Initially, I thought I would be a stranger to him, but my fears were immediately abated. Something in his eyes communicated a warmth and closeness to me and made me feel right at home.

They lived in this small town where my grandfather was born. Their home was very modest with dirt floors and sparse furnishings. What they lacked in monetary wealth was more than made up for by their happiness. I found them to be the most content and peaceful old couple I had ever met. Without the ability to communicate using the spoken word, they found ways to make me feel at home which far exceeded what any verbal expression could portray. They were always trying to make me feel comfortable, and in the customary Greek tradition, they wanted to be sure that I always had enough to eat.

The first meal that Auntie Forta cooked was roasted chicken. I had seen some chickens running around the backyard when I first arrived; were we eating one those chickens now? I wasn't sure, but the meal she prepared was the most delicious I had ever tasted. A chicken, roasted in the outdoor brick oven, was accompanied by succulent potatoes and vegetables, and served with fresh greens seasoned perfectly with garlic, lemon, and the most delicious olive oil to ever embrace my palate. I got a good-sized portion of everything, more than they took, and gobbled it up. I really wanted to show my appreciation for the meal and ate everything they put on my plate.

At times things were a little awkward because we couldn't talk to each other. We used mostly hand gestures, drew pictures to explain ourselves, and looked at photos. Early in the morning of my second day, I saw Auntie Forta actually chasing one of those chickens around the backyard. She eventually caught it, wrung its neck, and butchered it on the spot. She was quick and decisive, attacking that chicken like she had done it before. Later that day, we had another dinner. This time I was served nearly one-half of a chicken. Along with the potatoes and vegetables, I had a lot to eat

but finished it all.

The third day came with yet, another chicken dinner. This time the plate serving grew to almost a whole chicken. I ate everything once again; wanting to show my appreciation for the delicious food and to proudly demonstrate that we Americans really know how to eat. As I pondered the next day's meal I could see that the chicken population in the backyard was quickly diminishing. What was I to do? I knew that they were poor; how could I stop them from feeding me all their precious chickens? That's when the lady next door arrived to save me. I explained to her my situation and when she told my auntie and uncle what was going on, they all had a good laugh. It seems that when I ate everything on my plate, they thought I was still hungry. I wish I would have known earlier the custom in Greece is to leave a little food on your plate; it shows you are satisfied!

Brothers So Much A like

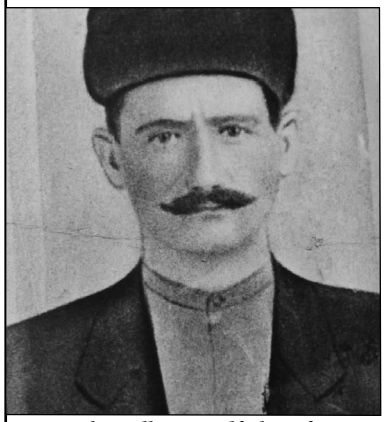
I was looking at Uncle Christos while he was sitting at the table reading the paper on the first evening of my trip to Kiato. I thought the jet lag and strange surroundings were playing tricks on my mind as I sat there observing his movements. He looked so much like my Uncle Louie from back home that I couldn't believe my eyes! He held his cigarette between his fingers the same way that Uncle Louie did, he crossed those skinny Ballas legs the same way, he talked and laughed like he was enjoying every one of life's moments; just like my uncle from home. Seeing the wrinkled knap of his neck and his hunched posture, most noticeable from his profile, made my visit to Greece seem surreal. Two brothers who never knew each other and lived over 5,000 miles apart looked identical, and shared the same gestures and the same mannerisms. They displayed the same personality traits that made them "uniquely Ballas".

I made those observations on my visit to Kiato, Greece, in 1972, and they remain as fresh and vivid in my mind as if it was only yesterday. It was on that first trip back to the "old country" in 1972 when I met Christos Ballas and his brother Theodoros. It was from these two great uncles I learned why they lived their entire lives in Greece, and why their five brothers lived in the United States. The story of a man with a dream for a better life for his family; and a plan to make that dream come true is "The Ballas Story".

Chapter 1

Across the Atlantic to America

As the story unfolds, six Greek brothers from a small village along the shores of the Gulf of Corinth in the Greek Peloponnesus, ventured across the ocean to a new world, a new land, and new challenges. They left their home with their father when they were just teenagers. It was not a time when they could look up to see jet trails in the blue sky. In those days, travel across an ocean was a long and arduous journey by ship. The boys left, one by one, with their father. They left their mother and remaining brothers behind, never really knowing if they would see them again.



Petros John Ballas, grandfather of Demetrius

The father's name was Demetrius Ballas, the grandson of Petros Ballas, and son of John Petros Ballas. We do not know much about Petros or John Petros, but we can assume that they were men of vision, with a sense of adventure and the will to strive for better life. They instilled this spirit in Demetrius, and with his lead, the boys that came to America and were given the chance to fulfill a dream for a better life for all of them.

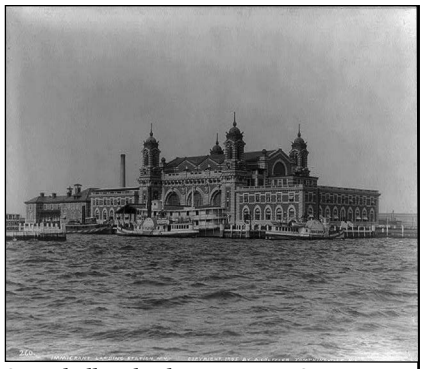
John, the oldest of the boys, was the first to leave for America with his father, Demetrius. They left their homeland of Greece at the dawn of the twentieth century. At the time, Greece was suffering from extremely poor economic conditions. It had virtually no trade or industry, and due to stock market speculation and crop failures, its currency (the drachma) was severely devalued. The future was bleak and America seemed to provide the best hope for a better life.

Demetrius and John arrived by ship to New York, New York and landed at Ellis Island. This was the principle debarkation and processing place for all immigrants to the United States from about 1890 to 1954. During this period, approximately 12 million immigrants entered the United States through Ellis Island. Nearly every country in Europe contributed to this immigration that made the United States the "melting pot" of the world. Those who came from Greece numbered about 500,000.



Immigrants being inspected, 1904

Demetrius and John were among those Greeks, and along with



Second Ellis Island Immigration Station, opened on December 17, 1900

millions from other countries, came in search of freedom and a chance for a better life. These "foreigners" disembarked from a long voyage across the Atlantic and were processed into their new country. Those who passed a medical exam were admitted, those who failed were sent back. The lucky ones who were admitted stayed on Ellis Island to complete the additional paperwork and then were required to move off the island. These new immigrants found themselves in a strange country, with a language and customs that they did not understand. The only help their new government could give them was to direct them to communities where their fellow countrymen were gathered who had come earlier.

Demetrius John Ballas, and his fifteen year old son, John Demetrius Ballas, passed their medical exams and were processed through the entry gates to the United States of America. The year was 1904, the year the Ballas' started their lives in America.



Brooklyn Museum - Climbing into the Promised Land Ellis Island - Lewis Wickes Hine

Demetrius and John left Ellis Island on a ferry to New York City. Demetrius had an idea on how to proceed and found a Greek community which helped to acquaint them with some of the nuances of their new surroundings. Their first challenge was to attain some understanding of the English language. John seemed to catch on quite well with this new language and was able to help them navigate the foreign waters of American culture and customs. Through their own form of "social networking" John and Demetrius found that there may be work available on the railroad yards in Chicago, Illinois. The fact that a train passed twice daily by their house in Greece was all they knew of railroads. In spite of their lack of experience and all the unknown obstacles that lay ahead, they decided to try railroad work.

They left New York and proceeded to the Chicago, the "Windy City". The best they could do was to find work on an "extra" gang in the Chicago rail yards. This was tough work, manual labor that challenged young John and his father. As they proved their mettle, they settled in to railroad work and started to collect steady paychecks.

The Plan Becomes More Clear

It was at this time, while he and John were working in Chicago, Demetrius' plan unfolded. Their paychecks started adding up and they saved and saved. Eventually, they had enough money to execute the next step in Demetrius' plan. That plan was to pay for passage for another one of the boys to come to America. After working and saving, and working and saving, one boy after the other came and joined their father working in the Chicago rail yards.

It is not quite clear if Demetrius traveled back and forth from America to Greece to bring each boy, or whether some of them came on their own. We do know that the brothers who had already arrived pooled their money to pay for the travel of their next brother. It was the collective effort of all the brothers which made it possible for all six to make it to America within a matter of a few years.

The Ballas immigrants as well as all those who entered through Ellis Island carry with them fascinating stories of human struggle and sacrifice. Unfortunately, the records kept regarding entry dates and other details on the Ballas Family and those other courageous individuals are not entirely accurate or complete. In fact, all records of the very early immigrants who came through Ellis Island were lost in a fire in 1897 that destroyed the original processing center. The center was quickly re-built and the huge influx of immigrants around 1900 pushed the new processing center to its limits. Records kept during those early years are full of errors, misspellings and other discrepancies. Without someone's personal recollection, it is virtually impossible to compile an exact list of dates and times when Demetrius and each of the boys entered the United States.

However, we do have what appears to be an accurate accounting of a travel date and route for one of the Ballas boy's trips to America. This information was obtained from a ship's manifest that has been recorded and preserved by The Statute of Liberty/Ellis Island Foundation Inc. The records indicate the second boy arrived in 1905 and the details are as follows:

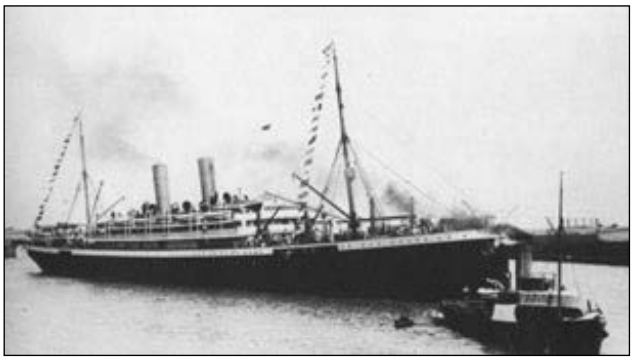
Passenger Vlassios Ballas, age 15, arrived April 13, 1905, last residence Corinto, departed from Naples, aboard Konigin Luise.

Along with this information the ship's manifest contains the following details:

Associated Passenger- Ballas, Vlassios, Date of Arrival- April 13,

1905, Port of Departure- Naples.

Built for North German Lloyd, German flag, in 1897 and named Konigin Luise. Bremerhaven-New York and Australia, also Mediterranean-New York service. Laid-up throughout World War I, 1914-18. Given as reparations to Orient Line, British flag, in 1919 and renamed Omar. UK-Australia and Mediterranean-New York service. Sold to Byron Steam-



The Konigin Luise

ship Company, British flag, in 1924 and renamed Edison. Piraeus-Mediterranean ports-New York service. Transferred to Greek registry in 1929. Scrapped in Italy in 1935.

From this information, it is clear that Vlassios (Bill) came just one year after Demetrius and John. Bill's travel route must have looked something like this: depart Kiato by train or bus traveling west to the port city of Patras, secure a ferry traveling across the Ionian and Adriatic Seas to Italy, to one of the port cities of Brindisi or Bari on the east coast of Italy, train or bus route across the southern part of the Italian peninsula to Naples, then onto the ship named Konigin Luise, arriving New York's Ellis Island approximately 25 days later.

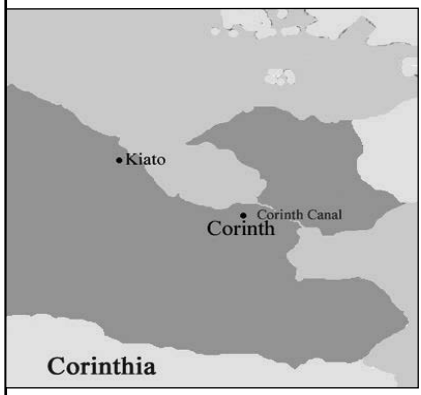
Bill was followed by the other brothers, Sam, Pete, Con, and Louie. We have no details on the travel routes or dates for any of these brothers except the following: Constantinos Ballas, age 17, arrived in 1917 from Ciaton, Greece, on ship from Piraeus, Greece.

Although we do know that Con did in fact come to America, the information above does not comport with the story as we know it. Perhaps the record above contains some of the inaccuracies and discrepancies of the immigration records discussed earlier. Is the person in this record the Con Ballas from our family? Was there actually a big gap in years between Con's arrival and the other boys? The name Ciaton is also puzzling because there are no cities in Greece spelled that way, so are we seeing just a misspelling of Kiato? Also, we know that our Con was born in 1894, but this record indicates that he would have been born in 1900 in order to be 17 years old when he arrived. *(The story of Con Ballas is a sad one. From a story passed on to me by Louie Ballas, a grandson of Old*

Demetrius, we know that while working on the railroad in Chicago, Con sustained a head injury. The injury was serious enough that he could no longer work and was sent back to Greece by his father. Con never fully recovered from his injury and died in Greece during World War II. Details of his death will follow later in this story).

Despite the fact that there are no accurate records, what we know for sure is the six Ballas boys arrived in America in the early 1900's. These adventurous and courageous boys left their homeland, traveled to a country where the language and customs were strange to them, and became part of their father's plan to make a better life for his family.

The Ballas Story and Demetrius' plan was more than simply getting his sons to America. Demetrius used the money left over after paying for travel expenses for his sons to purchase land in Greece. Most of this land was near the original family home. It was average land for the area; flat and rocky, but with proper cultivation, vegetables or citrus trees could grow. It appears Demetrius purchased small pieces of land, either on his trips back to Greece, or he sent money over to buy as much as he could afford at the time. He informally designated parcels of the land for each of the boys. Was this his plan? Did he buy this land so the boys could eventually come back to their homeland? Certainly, Demetrius had something in mind. Is that why he never brought his wife, Eleni to the new country? We can only assume he planned for all the boys to return and their mother would be there waiting to be reunited with her sons.



Loutraki Kiato Isthmia Vrachati

Where It All Started; Kiato, Greece

Kiato, a small village located on the shores of the Golf of Corinth (approximately 85 kilometers from Athens), is the Ballas' home where this story takes root. Only 10 kilometers from the ancient city of Corinth, Kiato is a beautiful and charming village. Its coastal beauty and mountainous backdrop typifies the beauty of Greece, and its proximity to Athens and Corinth place it near the cradle of the most cultural and philosophically advanced capitals of the ancient world.

I fell in love with our family's little village of Kiato on my first visit back in 1972. Its small narrow streets make it distinctly different from big cities like Athens or Chicago and allow for a feeling of kinship with the land itself. When I visited that first time, it was easy to see Uncle Christos was truly at home there, and that he was very proud to be from Kiato. The smile on his face and the glimmer in his eye was evident as he made daily

strolls through his beloved village. It was interesting to see people in their shops selling, chatting, and drinking Greek coffee as I accompanied him on his morning strolls. I couldn't help but think anyone in the Ballas family would be comfortable calling Kiato their home as I walked with Uncle Christos during those mornings.

We would start out at about 8:00 am, just in time to soak up the wonderful smells filling the air; smells of freshly baked breads, spinach pies, and rich Greek pastries. My uncle, the "unofficial mayor of Kiato", knew everyone. He stopped and smiled, talked and joked with people in every shop and at every street corner. It seemed to take forever to make our way down to the water, which was only eight to ten very short blocks. When we finally arrived at his favorite café on the shoreline that first morning, the nostalgia of the moment set in once again. Just as he reminded me of Uncle Louie the first night we met, he performed the exact routine that Uncle Louie did back home. Sitting at the café, Christos ordered a coffee with a shot of whiskey on the side. I looked at him and said with a huge smile, "Louie…Louie, nay….nay" (yes…yes in English), I pointed to the coffee and whiskey and said again, "Louie..Louie". I was trying to indicate to him that his brother, Louie, does the same thing back home. Uncle Christos' morning ritual of coffee and whiskey was identical to his brother's. I distinctly remember back home in the States, Louie used to say that drink got his blood flowing. Well, wouldn't you know, Christos laughed and made the motion of rubbing his chest and tapping his heart. Not only was his routine of the same, but his boastful claim that he was good for him because it got his blood flowing, was the same reason Louie gave for having his little drink in the morning. These two were so much alike, yet never knew each other and lived over 5,000 miles apart.

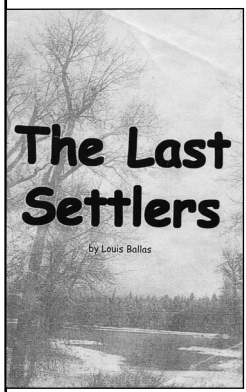
Those morning strolls were precious. The return trip home took even longer than it did to get down to the cafe. With his "blood flowing", Christos was even more animated and talkative. It was almost lunch time when we finally arrived back home. Auntie Forta, Christos' wife, would only shake her head as if to say: "Where have you been all this time?" Again nostalgia hit me. I remembered that Louie's wife, my Aunt Annie, would say when Louie returned from the local bar, "Louie, where have you been all this time?" Never argumentative, never confrontational, both Forta and Annie knew their husbands' habits and accepted them, for they knew that Louie and Christos would always make it home sooner or later. They also realized that these two were very social and the most well liked and engaging men in town. They knew that their husbands were, as were all the brothers, "uniquely Ballas".

Chapter 2

Uncle Louie's Book

The Early Years in America

The early years of *The Ballas Story* in America find Demetrius and his son's in Chicago, parts of Wisconsin, and in Savanna, Illinois. The details of how they found their way to these parts of the country are chronicled in a small book written by my great Uncle Louie, the fifth son to immigrate to America. The book was written in English, and because Uncle Louie never went to school to learn how to read or write in English, he may have had some help in getting all the words down on paper. Nonetheless, Louie's story was printed in the form of a booklet and bears the title: The Last Settlers *(Uncle Louie's book is reprinted its entirety in the back of this book and is available on TheBallasStory.com website. It is well worth reading; I recommend it highly.)*



The Last Settlers, by Louis Ballas

As Louie tells the story, a man and his five sons first came to America when the country was still young. By 1914, they had all arrived and worked together on the railroad in Chicago as an "extra gang" *(The extra gang was a crew of track laborers assigned to maintenance work on the railroad tracks. They replaced railroad ties and track and removed debris which could interfere with the travel of the trains. These laborers typically lived in camps alongside the tracks.)* In the fall of that year they were laid off. The Road Master liked the Ballas' and was able to find them work on the rail yards west of Chicago in the small town of Savanna, Illinois. The small town of Savanna (its largest population numbered 5,000 during the 1960's) is located about 140 miles directly west of Chicago. Savanna was an important junction for all trains westbound from Chicago. From Savanna, these trains either traveled through the upper Midwest States and out to Seattle, Washington, or traveled straight west to cities in California. The boys and their father needed to work so they moved to Savanna and set up their camp next to the rail yards.

Savanna turned out to be a good move for the Ballas'. Work was steady and the lifestyle there was appealing in many ways. The town itself is nestled between the banks of the Mississippi River and a string of steep bluffs and rolling hills formed during the Ice Age. The large body of water *(The Mississippi River is the fourth longest and tenth largest river in the world.)* made them feel right at home because they were accustomed to living near the water back in Greece. Savanna was also home to many immigrants who were also struggling to adjust to their new country.

The boys and their father worked in Savanna through the winter of 1914 and the spring of the next year. Old Demetrius then gathered his sons around him and told them he was returning to Greece to take care of their mother and their two younger brothers. What could only be

described as a gut-wrenching farewell speech, their father told them they may never see each other again. He blessed them with words of encouragement and told them they had proven themselves with hard work. Old Demetrius wished from the bottom of his heart, they would make America their home, be content and happy, and that "when they picked up dirt it would turn to gold".

John, the oldest, was to be in charge after his father left. Louie tells us John told him to take care of the cooking because their father, who used to do it, was gone. The boys working diligently and reconciled the fact that they were now on their own. After few months went by, one of the workers, named Tony Basile, came to John and told him that he had a sister in Chicago who was of the right marrying age. John was skeptical at first, and told Tony he couldn't worry about a girl because he had to look after his brothers. Tony told John the boys were old enough to take care of themselves. John finally agreed and used one of his free train passes and took the train into Chicago to meet this girl.

John was briefly introduced to Tony's sister whose name was Lucia (Lucy), and returned to Savanna without further expectations. However, a few days later, Tony's father--whose name was also Tony--brought Lucy to Savanna to see John and meet his brothers. Things went well and without further ado, everyone agreed a marriage between the two was a good idea. *(In those days marriage was often "arranged" by the parents of the couple. When John first came to Chicago, Lucy had no idea that he was there to check her out as a possible bride. When some of us grandkids became old enough to understand, she told us that she had practically no say in the matter and she only came to love Grandpa as the years went by.)*



John with wife, Lucy. Louie with wife, Annie. Antonio (Tony) Basile seated

The only sticking point to the marriage was Tony didn't think that living in a box car was the proper place for his daughter. John promised to get a house in town and the plans for the marriage proceeded. John Ballas and Lucy Basile married and lived in town for the next three years. The brothers visited often, enjoying a nice clean house and Grandma's cooking. One day Lucy's father approached John with a business proposition. After some discussion, they agreed to start a small grocery store. John used money that he saved from the railroad and went into business.

The start of the grocery store by John was the beginning of the Ballas boy's departure from railroad work to new ventures. Pete soon gave up on railroad work after John bought the store and moved back to Chicago. He started a restaurant with a friend. The remaining brothers,

Bill, Sam, and Louie remained on the railroad but became increasingly disenchanted. One day, while they were visiting Pete in Chicago, they came upon an advertisement for farm land for sale in Wisconsin. They all thought they would be good farmers because they had learned some things about farming back home in Greece. Using their train passes, they made their way to a point in central Wisconsin near the towns of Merrill and Antigo. After looking at several properties, they found about 480 acres of land complete with a farm house and small storage barn. Bill felt right at home when they came across this land and commented to his brothers that the place was beautiful, nice and clean. When they all heard the familiar sound of a train rumbling down the tracks running through the middle of the property, their minds were made up that this would be their new home.



Chicago Savanna and Antigo

The total cost of the land was about $10,000. The boys did not quite have all the money they needed so John loaned them $3,000 dollars so they could buy it all for cash. Brimming with confidence and an eagerness to become successful farmers, the boys setup their farm house with supplies and started to work the land.

Troubles on the Farm and a Marriage for Bill

The first job before any crops could be planted was to clear brush and trees from the land. The boys intended to use an old horse that came with the property to pull stumps and haul brush. When they attempted to harness it, they found out they really didn't know what they were doing. Luckily a neighbor came by to introduce himself and said, "Boys, in the first place you have the collar upside down and your lines are all wrong." The neighbor, named Al, helped them with the horse and then after inquiring about what land they bought, sadly informed them most of their acreage was swamp land. Not to be deterred, the boys continued on their plan to be farmers.

The difficulty with the horse was only the beginning of their troubles in trying to farm the land. Another neighbor came by and told them they could sell the wood they cleared off. This sounded like a good idea to the boys because they thought they could make money even before their crops came in. They worked laboriously for three weeks clearing stumps and brush, and cutting trees. They sent the wood by rail to a land company but soon received a note saying the wood was unusable and they would

only be reimbursed for the cost of the shipping. They were somewhat discouraged but continued to try and clear the land. They burned most of the stumps and brush and saved what was left for their winter stoves.

Their first winter came roaring in like a beast. Cold winds and heavy snows made life miserable for them. The boys were all born in the Mediterranean climate of Greece; one can only imagine how difficult it was for them to get used to Wisconsin winters. *(On a personal note, this past February I was in Wisconsin to visit my 93 year old mother and was reminded just how cold it can be in that part of the country. When it snows or spits sleet, one's eye brows and eyelashes turn white with frost. Any exposed skin turns red and gets so cold it feels like it will break apart. The drip from a runny nose turns to icicles before it hits the ground and every extremity is numb with such an intense cold that it makes it difficult to walk. One must keep moving if caught outside in a Wisconsin or could actually freeze to death. Folks in central Wisconsin and areas like Antigo experience this type of weather for a period of four to five months straight. It's hard to imagine that Old Demetrius envisioned this type of hardship when he dreamt for a better life for his family.)*

That first winter's bite exposed other obstacles that the Ballas boys were ill-prepared to handle. The horse died from exhaustion, they couldn't get to town with their sleigh because the snow was too deep, and they didn't know what to do to be productive during the long winter months. The boys even had a hard time in the kitchen. Sam tried to bake bread, but it didn't rise because he forgot to add yeast to the dough. It was the kindness of a neighbor lady who offered to bake bread for them which helped them survive the winter.

With the advent of spring, it became increasingly clear that it would take years for them to get the land cleared enough for planting. When they realized their plight, they thought maybe they should divide the land between the three of them and let each determine his own fate. Bill resisted this idea at first because he remembered Old Demetrius told them to stick together. Eventually, they all agreed and divided the land according to what each had put into it when it was purchased.

Bill was determined to make a go at farming. He realized his brothers may not be with him any longer and decided he needed a wife to help him. There were no people for miles around, let alone a single girl who would marry a Greek man on a poor farm. Bill realized this and wrote home to his father and asked him to send over a girl. The details of what led up to her arrival to America are in Uncle Louie's book. Old Demetrius found a girl named Christina and prepared her for a marriage to his son. Uncle Louie's account of this "arranged marriage" is both comical and indicative of the times when fixed marriages were commonplace.

Bill was required to write an affidavit in support of his bride-to-be before she could immigrate to this country. He drafted a notarized letter with the help of a local attorney, and sent it to immigration services. A copy of the original letter is mounted on his son Gus' living room wall

in Santa Barbara, California. Excerpts from that letter read something like this:

"...under oath, I request permission from the proper authorities for my sweetheart Christina Lagogiani to enter the United States..." the letter goes on to address several required questions:

Name and age: William Ballas,30 years old
Date of Arrival in the United States: 1905
Date of first papers filed for citizenship: December 1, 1922
Occupation: Farmer
Average weekly wage: Such as any other new settler makes. A good living and more. Owner of three 40's in Langlade County, Wisconsin.
About the applicant: She is of good, sound health, physically and mentally, and is not crippled or deformed.

The attorney also made a separate statement which was incorporated in the letter. It read in part: " I am personally acquainted with William Ballas... he is a healthy young man, sober, industrious, and with no bad habits... he also has three brothers who reside on farms in the vicinity... I have known them over one year and they are steady, hardworking young men."

Bill vouched for his "sweetheart" whom he never laid eyes on before, nor spoke with, or even corresponded with by letter. The affidavit letter was dated December 1, 1922, the same date he filed for first papers for citizenship.

According to Louie, everyone waited for Christina with great anticipation. The boys went to the station to meet her while Bill was getting himself ready. As she was coming down the road with her future brothers-in-law, Bill was so dumbfounded when he saw her that he froze and could not speak. She was the first to break the ice. She spoke up and said, "I traveled over four thousand miles to see you. Can't you even walk four or five steps to meet me?"

After looking the place over, Christina saw only brush and stumps. When she made the simple comment that her father-in-law told her farms were rich in America and grew wheat, corn and other things, Bill told her their farm would be that way after they cleared more land. Christina thought it would be okay and the couple was soon married.

They tried to make a go of farming, but their efforts did not pay off. They had no experience at farming in the Wisconsin climate and the land continued to be uncooperative. Christina soon became pregnant so they decided to go to Savanna in order to have help with the baby. They decided to give up farming and sold all their animal stock and supplies at auction and left the farm. Sam had nowhere to go so he accompanied Bill and Christina to Savanna and lived with them until the baby was born. Meanwhile, Louie had already moved back to Savanna and was working

for John in the grocery store. It seemed for the Ballas boys that farming just wasn't the way to make a better life.

Bill and Sam worked on the railroad when the baby was born, but after a few months they became disenchanted once again. They still owned the land in Wisconsin and thought they should try farming once more. Sam went along with Bill, Christina, and their baby boy and left Savanna for the farm.

It became apparent that Sam needed a wife, too. Rather than having one sent over, he decided to go back to Greece and find one himself. Sam left for his home in Kiato, stayed a few weeks and returned with his wife, Diana. They lived with Bill and Christina for a while, and then built their own cabin. Christina and Diana were good company for each other. They worked together trying to keep the farm viable, and helped each other out when their children started to arrive.

More Years and No Results

The next several years of farming did not pay any significant dividends. The brothers worked extremely hard but the land was simply too full of trees and brush. When a section was finally cleared it would be too wet and sloppy to produce good crops. Their brother, John, even sent up a friend and his family from Savanna to work alongside the boys, but the friend (a Greek named Kompos) soon became discouraged because the land was too difficult to work. Uncle Louie himself returned for another attempt at farming; but even he could not make an impact.

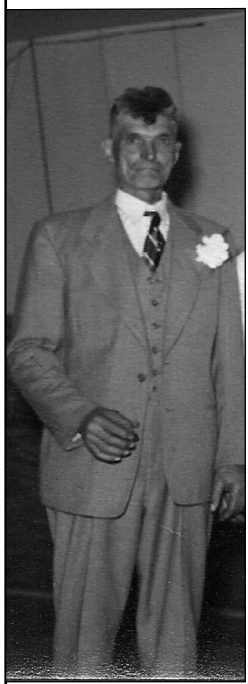
In addition to the poor quality of the land, the Ballas brothers faced other challenges. The nearest town was almost impossible to get to during the winter, medical help was far away, and their children who had reached school age had to travel a long distance over difficult terrain to reach their school house.

The poor quality of the land and the remote location of the farm were challenging enough, but when two fires erupted on the property, the boys' dream of making a better life for themselves on the farm literally went up in smoke. A lightening strike caused the first fire which destroyed what valuable spruce trees they had as well as many acres of land. The second fire was caused by neighbor kids playing with matches. It destroyed Bill's barn and much of his equipment. The barn was rebuilt and the equipment was replaced as the boys pressed on.

After several more years toiling with the uncooperative land with limited results, the boys evoked help from the government when they heard about a Federal rehabilitation program for farmers. In 1934, they actually wrote a letter to the President of the United States asking for help in setting up a town as well as help in homesteading their property. They received a response about a year later saying the government would make them a cash buyout offer and turn the land into a wilderness preserve. Regrettably the boys accepted the offer and received a small compensa-

tion for the "swamp land" they had bought twenty two years prior. *(In a federal government land reclamation project during the 1930's, poor quality farm land was bought and made into wilderness preserves. The Ballas boys received about 10 cents on the dollar for the land they worked so hard to make productive).*

Dreams of Farming Continued Under Changed Circumstances



Bill (Vlasios) Ballas, second son of Demetrius to come to America. Tall, long legged, with bushy hair.

The details on what followed after the boys sold their farm property to the Federal government go something like this: Bill had to find a source of income and accepted work on a federal government project called the Works Project Administration (WPA). This was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's plan to put people back to work after the depression and to build America's infrastructure. Bill worked on the project for about two years, and then with some money saved and some money borrowed, he bought a small farm outside of Antigo. Sam bought a farm as well-about a mile or two from Bill's. He and Bill continued with their dream of being farmers and worked on their new farms the rest of their lives until they were too old to do the physical labor that was required. Louie also got back into farming for a while and then ventured out once more to search for new opportunities. He ran a small tavern, a grocery store, and went back and forth to Savanna trying to find his niche in life.

I remember a few things from my childhood when we used to go up to Antigo and visit Bill and Christina back in the mid 1950's. Bill and his wife lived in a small, square farmhouse with their two boys, Jimmy and Gus. Bill was a tall and skinny man, with bushy grey hair that stood up high on his head. To me, he looked like a picture of Andrew Jackson from my American history book.

Old Uncle Bill was an intriguing man. One might say he was a little eccentric; however, I would suggest he simply exhibited one of the Ballas traits--he was very excitable and high strung. He made quick movements as if he was always in a hurry. Watching him lock the front door of the farmhouse from the inside, and then crawl out the adjacent window and onto the porch caused me to wonder. Especially when he said in these exact words while addressing my brothers and me in a convincingly serious tone: "…got to lock the door to keep out the robbers… let's go boys…let's go boys….". This routine of leaving the house through the window was a bit puzzling in light of the fact that he would leave that same window open so we could get back into the house on our return. My

guess is that he had no key to the front door. *(Bill's excitable and quick actions were personality traits that he shared with his brother, John Demetrius. As I grew older and got to know more of our family, I came to realize that Uncle Junior possessed these same traits, along with other men in the family that make them all "uniquely Ballas.)*



Bill and wife, Christina, with sons, Jimmy and Gus (foreground). Farmhouse where Bill would lock the front door then climb out the side window. (friends from Savanna in the background).

I also got to know Bill's wife, Christina, who was very sweet to us during those visits. Her broken English was hard to understand, but we could see the love in her heart through her eyes.

I do not remember meeting Uncle Sam, but I know he worked hard on his farm and made a life for his family. His wife, Diana, supported him through all the trials and tribulations of the Wisconsin farming experience. Diana was very "Greek", so much so that she insisted all of their four sons, Jim, Chris, John, and Spiros marry Greek girls. They did as she wished. Two of the boys, Chris and John, were well educated and worked in various accounting businesses. Jim got into radio and became an announcer for WATK in Antigo, Wisconsin. Eventually he made it out to Wyoming and worked many years for Curt Gowdy (a well-known sports commentator for NBC and ABC in the 60's and 70's). Jim finished his career in broadcasting with National Public Radio in Lincoln, Nebraska. Spiros also worked in radio and became a disc jockey for the local Antigo station.

...the Boys Named Jim

Perhaps now is a good time to mention an interesting result that occurs in the Greek tradition of naming children. As the tradition goes, the first son is to be named after the father's father (or grandfather of the child). In our case, Demetrius (James or Jim) is the grandfather to the first generation of boys born in the United States. Therefore, John, Bill, Sam and Louie each named their first son, Jim. Another son, usually the second son, is to be named after the father. Consequently we have many relatives with the same given name. *(This can be confusing when constructing a genealogy tree.)* The repetition of a name can also confound a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse. For example, at one time in Antigo there were three Jim Ballas' in the same school, in the same room; Bill's Jim, Sam's Jim, and Louie's Jim. The teacher figured out a way around the possible confusion which could arise and addressed the boys as either; Bill's, Sam's or Louie's…. Jim! In subsequent chapters we will see that John, Christos and Theodoros also had a Jim. Count them: six Jim Ballas', all first cousins, all named after their grandfather, Demetrius.

This naming tradition also applies to the girls, although not for the second girl born. So, we have multiple first cousins named Helen because their grandmother's name was Helen (Eleni). Four of the boys, John and Louie in America, and Christos and Theodoros in Greece, each named a daughter Helen following this tradition.

The entire Ballas Family Tree can be found on Ancestry.com by following the link on TheBallasStory.com website where you will find the future generations of Ballas' with additional Jims and Helens and repetitive names used to honor parents and grandparents.

Chapter 3

Savanna, Illinois

(Author's note: This chapter of The Ballas Story will be the longest and will contain more details and stories of the family than other sections. I have some very personal and vivid memories of the Ballas life in Savanna. I was born and raised there, and my roots and values are still firmly anchored in Savanna. In this chapter I will refer to my father, mother, grandparents and all others as they are related to me. I choose to do this out of respect for my close family members who are still living, as well as those who have passed away and are now in Greek and Italian heaven.)

The first of the boys to immigrate to America was John, my Grandpa. His full name was John Demetrius Ballas. My Dad is Grandpa's first born son, James John Ballas. Both Grandpa's and Dad's names come from incorporating the Greek naming tradition into both their given and middle names. How about that!

As we know, Grandpa settled in Savanna and married my Grandma, Lucy Basile from Chicago. Grandpa chose not to join his brothers in Wisconsin despite their insistence that he should help them farm and start their own town. *(One of the brothers in Wisconsin had the idea to start a town, calling it "Ballas Town.")* I am convinced his decision to remain in Savanna was not so much of his own making; rather, it was that of Grandma's. After hearing of her tell how the boys all seemed to "move in" with Grandpa and her when they got married, it was obvious why she wanted stay in Savanna -- it was 350 miles from Antigo!

She often recounted how she was expected to cook and clean for the boys, and how she "didn't marry one Greek….she married the whole family". Grandma was extremely strong-willed and had no problem telling Grandpa how things were going to be. As time passed and the family grew, she became the undeniable matriarch of the entire Ballas family in Savanna.

During the early days of their marriage, Grandpa worked on the railroad. His proclivity for language, which served him well when Demetrius and he first landed in America, helped him get a better job on the railroad in Savanna. Grandpa's ability to communicate with many of the immigrant groups garnered him the position of "section gang foreman". This job not only paid more, but gave him an aura of respectability among the other workers. Savanna was like a "mini-melting pot" of nationalities. In addition to the Italians and Greeks who worked on the section gang, there were Polish, Germans, Czechs, Croats, Yugoslavians, Mexicans, and Spaniards. Grandpa was able to relate to all these workers of different ethnic backgrounds because they all came to America around the same time as he did and shared the common desire to find better lives for themselves. When Grandma's father helped Grandpa get into the grocery store business, it was the first attempt by any of the Ballas brothers to demonstrate some risk-taking and an entrepreneurial spirit. Grandpa's small grocery store was symbolic of the continuation of the Ballas Family's pursuit of a dream for a better life.

The store was a modest business that sold groceries and various sundry items. Most of the customers consisted of people who knew Grandpa; immigrant workers from the railroad. They all had worked with Grandpa and knew him to be a fair man. They also knew they could lean on him for help. As a regular course of business, Grandpa would extend credit to the men and their families who were struggling to make a living, never turning down people in need. Grandma, too, was very kind to all those that needed help. However, she did not believe in just giving things away and displayed her business savvy early on by keeping track of all the accounts. As soon as payday arrived, she kindly reminded those who bought groceries on credit that it was time to pay.

Should we be proud or embarrassed?

Life in Savanna, as was true with most of America in 1920's and 1930's, was tough. Things got even tougher with the ratification of 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1919. By nature of this amendment, all manufacture, distribution and sales of alcohol were prohibited. This affected most men (and a few more worldly woman) who enjoyed a drink as a way to make a tough life more bearable. Grandpa and Grandma, well established in their grocery store, got into the business of providing the prohibited drink to thirsty locals around Savanna. Grandma told us kids they used to make gin in the family wash tub. Then they would bottle it and sell it out the back door of the grocery store with other liquor they somehow acquired. In those days, this type of transaction was called "bootlegging". Grandma, although not boastful or proud of this part of the business, told us that it was just a way to make a living.

This bootlegging operation was dangerous and definitely illegal. We were told that on several occasions that Grandpa was actually arrested and put in jail. This was very alarming for the family and disrupted the normal flow of commerce for both legal and illegal transactions. True or not, it was said that angry mobs of the local citizenry would march down to the jail and demand John Ballas be released. Did they do this out of respect for Grandpa, or out of necessity for the food and booze he provided? It was probably for both reasons. In any case, Grandpa was always released, then went right back to his grocery and bootlegging activities. *(The prohibition on alcohol was repealed by the 21st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1933, thereby exonerating Grandpa and Grandma for their miss-deeds during the thirteen years they operated an illegal business.)*

Grandpa and Grandma eventually got into the legal side of the liquor business after prohibition was repealed. They bought a building on a prominent corner of Main Street in Savanna and started "Ballas Tavern". The tavern served locals and those passing through town. It soon became a favorite spot for just about everybody who could now enjoy a legal drink. The early of the success of the tavern allowed Grandpa to expand his entrepreneurial ventures. He started a beer distributorship and pur-

chased two additional rental buildings down the street from the tavern.

Grandpa became a well-respected and successful business man, but he couldn't have done it without Grandma at his side. The good business skills she learned at the grocery store assured them the money they were taking in at the bar would net a profit. It was her firm hand in the operations side of the business that provided financial security for the family. Grandma and Grandpa made "good money" for those days; money for the immediate family, and money to help out extended family members when in need. Their success was a realization of the dream Demetrius had when he took a big risk and brought his oldest son, John, to America.

Matriarch and Mother

All the relatives and the folks from Savanna recognized Grandma's hard work and saw her as the matriarchal authority of the Ballas Family. They no doubt chuckled when she often publicly chastised Grandpa for drinking up the profits or for being too generous and giving away too many free drinks. Grandma was an amazingly strong woman. She ran the tavern, kept Grandpa in check, and raised their six children. This Italian woman, small in stature but big in heart and strength, who married into the Ballas Family under an "arrangement", bore the first of the next generation of the Ballas' in America.



Dad standing outside the tavern in Savanna

My Dad, Jim, and my aunt, Helen, were the first of the Ballas' born outside of Greece. The Greek naming tradition held true to form; Dad was named after his grandfather (Demetrius) and Helen was named after her grandmother (Eleni).

Dad was a tall, good looking man, and stood proud on his skinny Ballas legs. Although he looked mostly "Greek", he did inherit an Italian feature from Grandma, a thick and wavy head of jet-black hair. He was handsome enough to be in the movies, sort of a Tyrone Power look, especially when he would "slick down" his hair with a popular tonic called, "Rose's Hair Oil". Dad grew up under Grandma's stern hand and often worked in the family business. He went to the local Savanna schools and completed high school. In those days, college was not a practical option, so Dad worked in the tavern as a young man after high school; it seemed he was destined to take over the family business at some point.

Dad's oldest sister was Aunt Helen. Following her, came Uncle

Tom, Aunt Carolyn, Aunt Madeline and Uncle John (Jr). These siblings grew up in the years that saw the prohibition on alcohol and the Great Depression come and go. They all learned that money didn't grow on trees and scrimping, saving and not having everything you wanted were facts of life. The difficult years during their youth made them successful later on and the strong work ethic Grandma instilled in them served them well.

Aunt Helen married Jack Miller (big fella with a mustache if I remember correctly) and lived in a town a few hours away. Aunt Helen was a beautiful and talented woman. In her early years after leaving Savanna, she made it to New York City and among her other accomplishments, sang in the opera and at Radio City Music Hall. Jack and Aunt Helen had two daughters, Jackie and Kathy, whom we would see once in a while at family gatherings.

Uncle Tom, the second son, looked more "Basile" than "Ballas." Although he didn't quite possess the typical Ballas physical stature, he was a very proud and successful man. Early on in life it was apparent he possessed an extraordinary ability to make money. Uncle Tom was perhaps the most financially successful Ballas of his generation. At the age of 18, he became the youngest Ford automobile dealer in the United States when he ran a car dealership from one of Grandpa's buildings down the street from the tavern. Uncle Tom had a daughter, Marlyn, and two sons, Tom and Terry. In the years that followed, they moved to California where the rest of Uncle Tom's story will unfold.

Aunt Carolyn was born next. She was eight years younger than my Dad and was one of the prettiest girls in Savanna. Carolyn was Dad's favorite and she looked up to her big brother with admiration. When she was a little girl, she would go down to the tavern and beg my Dad for favors, treats or money for a new dress. The close bond between them carried through their adult lives. Aunt Carolyn married Bob Sievert and worked with him in their family-operated tavern and restaurant in Mt. Carroll, Illinois, a smaller town than Savanna and located 10 miles away. Aunt Carolyn and Uncle Bob's first child was a daughter, Joanie. Born in 1943, Joanie was the first born great grandchild of Demetrius Ballas. She preceded the twenty two more of us great grandchildren who were born from his son John in America, a country 5,000 miles from Greece in fulfillment of the "dream for a better life" Demetrius had for his family.



Carolyn Ballas

Next in line after Carolyn came John, or Junior, as he was called by the whole family. Uncle Junior was the youngest boy and without a doubt the most spoiled and mischievous in the family. He had a very sharp mind and because he wasn't so keen on serious work, he seemed destined to be the first in the family to go to college. Grandma was so



Carolyn and Bob Sievert; wedding picture

worried about Uncle Junior getting into trouble he was sent to a military high school for boys in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was probably Grandma's idea to send him away to school because it was the only way she could keep him from playing pool (billiards) with the railroad men at the pool hall next to the tavern. At the tender age of fifteen, he could beat anyone in town. Back in those days they played for money and I think Grandma was afraid because he was winning so often the older men would eventually take offense.

(I can personally attest to Uncle Junior's prowess in pool... on more than one occasion I saw him beat really good players in bars out in California. It was not unusual for him to "run the table" in a game of 8-ball without even taking his cigarette out of his mouth.)

Uncle Junior did extremely well at the military high school and graduated with honors. Grandma wanted him to continue his education and set her sights on getting Junior into one of the most prestigious universities in the country, The University Notre Dame. This was not only a great private school, but also very expensive. Grandma made a concerted effort to have the required tuition money if Junior was accepted to Notre Dame. During the years he was in high school, Grandma started to save money any way she could. I distinctly remember her telling us when she was at the tavern she would pour the nickel beers "a little short." When the patrons asked her why she was not pouring a full glass, she responded. "Junior has to go to college" or "We all 'gotta help pay Junior's tuition." The men had no choice but to accept her explanation and say, "Okay, Ma". *(Out of total respect for her and how she ran a good establishment, everyone who came into the tavern called her "Ma Ballas".)*



Uncle Tom and Dad congratulating their younger brother, Junior, on graduating from Notre Dame.

Uncle Junior did make it to Notre Dame and graduated, yet again, with honors. He majored in Business and Spanish. After graduation, he traveled to Cuba to work on his language skills and to work for a large U.S. corporation. However, Junior was still a small-town boy and soon came back to Savanna. He fell in love with and married a local

girl from Sabula, Iowa (a small, backwater town across the river from Savanna). His wife, my Aunt Colleen, was a good fit for Junior. She was sensible, strong and could keep him on the right path. Uncle Junior worked with Uncle Tom in the car dealership and started to raise a family. Eventually, he decided to go out on his own and followed a friend's suggestion (as well as Horace Greeley's) and went out west. *(Horace Greeley was a newspaper editor, politician and reformer in the early 1800'. He was famous for popularizing the phrase, "Go west young man….", when speaking to a young friend about America's expansion westward.)*

After attending a school in Arizona that specialized in training foreign businessmen, Colleen and he and their four children moved to California. It was Uncle Junior who recognized the endless opportunities that California had to offer and as they say, "the rest is history" because most of the family in Savanna eventually followed him. There were so many family members who moved to California that a chapter of this book is devoted to all the Ballas' in California.

The youngest of Grandpa and Grandma's children was Aunt Madeline. She also was very intelligent, but unlike Junior, she was not able to continue her education beyond high school. As the youngest, she was the closest in age to my brothers and me. The thing I remember most about Aunt Madeline is she was very interested in the details of virtually every subject. I can remember how she even wanted to know about all my elementary and high school friends; what families they came from, who were the most popular, the best looking, and which of the girls I liked best and why. Aunt Madeline was very cerebral; it seemed that she filed away information in her head like a computer. She was perhaps brilliant to the point of being exceptional. She married and raised two boys who became very successful and respected professionals in the fields of hospital administration and law.

The Italian Connection and Becoming Catholics

The Ballas Family was well known and respected by virtually all of the people in Savanna. They made many life-long friends. In particular, they developed a very close relationship with the Italian families in town. From Grandpa's days on the railroad, and the early days when he and Grandma operated the grocery store, the Italians became close friends of our family. Perhaps the commonality between the Greeks and the Italians from the old country led to this friendship. They both were immigrant groups struggling to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture. Also, they both were from Mediterranean countries and shared a similar cultural heritage. The undeniable bond that the Italian families had with the Ballas' was they came to America in search of the same dream that Demetrius had for our family; a dream for a better life.

When Grandpa was introduced to Grandma through the friend on the railroad, their subsequent marriage solidified the bond between

the Greeks and Italians. The entire Ballas Family and the Basiles from Grandma's side became very close. In fact, a few years after Grandpa and Grandma were married, Uncle Louie married Grandma's sister, Annie. Along with the Italians from the railroad who worked with Grandpa and his brothers, the Italians in and around Savanna and Chicago became like second cousins to our family. In addition to the Basiles, "we Greeks" became close friends with families like the Morganos, Ciminos, Engaldos, Stompanatos, Ginies, Cravattas, and more. These Italian families were representative of the over four and a half million Italians who immigrated to America during a 50 year period around the end of the 19th century.

Grandma Lucy was one of these immigrants. She came to America with her mother and father at the tender age of five years old. As the story goes, she was so scared and cried so much on her arrival to Ellis Island that the authorities thought she was sick. It took her mother two days to calm her down so they could be released from the quarantine section of the processing center and be admitted to the United States. Ten years after her arrival, this "scared little girl" now only fifteen or sixteen years old, married Demetrius' oldest son, John, and ultimately became the matriarchal head of the family in Savanna. The strength and resolve she utilized to make the family business successful, also was put to use in the raising of her family. Grandma made all of the important decisions regarding the upbringing of her children. Dad, Uncle Tom and Uncle Junior, and Aunt Helen, Aunt Carolyn and Aunt Madeline were all brought up Grandma's way. She insisted that they all be baptized in the Catholic faith. They attended St. John's Catholic Grade School, they all received the relevant Catholic sacraments, and they were all married in the Catholic Church. Grandpa seemed to go along with Grandma's insistence regarding the children's faith and, although he did not officially become Catholic himself, he probably became one by default. Grandpa was Greek Orthodox by birth, but all of us kids grew up without a hint of any other religious influence other than a Catholic one.

Grandpa's Italian connection and the Catholic upbringing of his children were unique in regards to the other sons of Demetrius Ballas. Bill, Pete, and Sam, who were living up in Wisconsin during that time, remained Greek Orthodox. As we know, Bill and Sam married Greek girls from the "old country" and held their Greek heritage dear. Christos and Theodoros who lived in Greece were born and raised Greek Orthodox and remained true to the faith throughout their lives. The only other son of Demetrius who became somewhat "Italianized" was Uncle Louie. By virtue of his marriage to Grandma's sister, Aunt Annie, they became a Catholic family. Aunt Annie was not as strong-willed as her big sister, but still had enough fortitude to insist on raising her children, Jimmy, Helen and Caroline, in the Catholic faith. When Louie and Annie moved to Savanna they too, became very close friends with the Italians around town.

As the years went by and we grandchildren grew up, it was re-

ally "cool" to say we were Italian. Of course, when it was popular to be unique and to be "Greek", we claimed that distinction as well. Through the years when either the Greeks or Italians fell out of favor for one reason or another, my brothers and I would claim to have more blood in us from the nationality that was not being criticized. It seems silly now, but I think we just wanted to be well-liked. Things have changed for me as I have come to understand and appreciate my heritage. As of this writing, the poor Greeks are being blamed for a world-wide financial crisis. So, right now it may not be popular to be Greek, but I don't care what people think. I am damn proud to be Greek and often boast that I am from a Greek family. I am the great grandson of Demetrius Ballas and a product of his dream. I am also the grandson of Lucy Basile Ballas, an Italian woman of strong will, whose love, fortitude and resolve was instrumental in making Demetrius' dream become a reality for my family.

More On My Dad, My Mom and Our family

Dad worked in the tavern nearly every day and pretty much started to take over operations when he was still in his early twenties. He was well-known in Savanna, outgoing and very friendly to his customers as well as to the small business owner's on Main Street. When things were slow, he would take a break and walk "down the street" wearing his long white tavern apron to visit folks and see what was going on. One day on one of his breaks, his life changed forever because he met a new girl in town who was waitressing at the café down the street. Rosemary Anny, from La Crosse Wisconsin, instantly captured his heart. Although she already had a boyfriend, Dad persisted in asking her out. Refusal after refusal did not deter his efforts. Finally, she said yes, they began dating, and the old boyfriend was quickly forgotten.

Rosemary and Dad dated for a while in Savanna until she had to go back to LaCrosse. That's when things got sticky. Dad would venture up the 150 miles to LaCrosse as often as he could to see Rosemary. However, this was not a courtship Grandma approved of and told Dad, "Either you marry her, or you don't." So, with Grandma at the helm, fully exercising her matriarchal authority, she and Dad went to meet Rosemary's parents. Things went fairly well and after some thought, Rosemary's tough Sicilian father, Leonardo, acquiesced to the engagement. (It may be said he initially wasn't in favor of it. After all, having his precious daughter fall in love with "tavern keeper" was not a scenario



Jimmy and Rosemary's wedding picture. Groomsmen: Mom's brothers, Salvatore (left) and John (right). Bridesmaids, Dad's sisters, Helen (left) and Carolyn (right).

he had envisioned). Nevertheless, Leonardo granted his permission and Dad married the new girl he met at the café in Savanna.

They were married in LaCrosse, Wisconsin in 1942. Instead of being able to start their married life, a major obstacle loomed over-head. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, which occurred just 10 months before their marriage, America was at war. It was inevitable that all able-bodied men were going to be called to duty. Dad was certainly able-bodied, and in spite of the uneasiness of the situation, they found time for a honeymoon. Due to practical and economic constraints facing them, Dad and Mom went to Antigo, Wisconsin to stay with Uncle Louie and Aunt Annie at the farm. They "honeymooned" at the farm for almost three months. Mom learned how to drive a tractor while Dad helped Uncle Louie pitch hay and do farm chores. Quite the romantic getaway; a honeymoon on a farm in the same small house with your Aunt and Uncle!

Eventually, Dad joined the Army instead of waiting to get drafted and joined the scores of other young men from Savanna who were either called to duty or volunteered. These brave men who were to serve their country included Dad, Uncle Tom, Bob Sievert (Aunt Carolyn's husband) and some of the fellows who worked for Grandpa in the beer distributing company. Dad went through basic training and was assigned to a bomb disposal unit. He was able to return a few times to Savanna from army training before he was shipped off to Europe in 1944.

Mom, now alone in her new town of Savanna, was taken under the matriarchal wing of Grandma and worked in the tavern. In those days Savanna was home to a U.S. Army Supply Depository ("the depo"). This depo was staffed by American troops who would often frequent the tavern. Mom's job was to run the dice table in the makeshift recreation/gambling hall in the upper level of the tavern. She worked alongside her sister-in-law, Carolyn, whose husband Bob was in the U. S. Coast Guard. Mom's "take" was any profit that the dice game brought into the establishment. Grandma's placement of two attractive girls, albeit married girls, was good for business and the tavern thrived during the war. No hanky-panky allowed, just hard work under Grandma's strict rules made the Ballas Tavern the favorite of the soldiers from the depo and of the locals from Savanna.



Dad in Europe during World War II disassembling an unexploded bomb.

Dad left for overseas in 1944, but not before he and Mom already "started" a family. Mom was pregnant when Dad left for duty. So, while he was disassembling unexploded bombs in faraway trenches in France and Germany, Mom gave birth to a son.

My brother, John James Ballas, born in 1945, was the first great grandson of Demetrius Ballas, and therefore the first to carry the Ballas name for his generation. Demetrius must have been proud when he eventually found out that he had a new great grand-

son because it was insured the Ballas name would live on in America.

Dad returned home after the United States celebrated V-E Day and Little Johnny was already over a year old. *(V-E Day stands for Victory in Europe Day, which marked the date of May 8, 1945 when the World War II allies formally accepted the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany, thus ending the war in Europe. Japan surrendered three months later, that day is referred to as V-J Day, for Victory over Japan Day.)*



Mom with her new born son, Johnnie.

According to Mom, when Dad saw his son for the first time it was as if he witnessed a miracle. His heart poured out with love and his chest filled with pride. For Dad had written letters from overseas, almost daily which amounted to hundreds of letters. Written on very light and thin blue paper, these letters expressed how much he loved his wife, missed her and wanted so much to see his son. Standing in front of his little boy for the first time he was speechless and frozen in time. Mom said, "Go ahead, Jim, you can touch him, hold him in your arms, he's the boy you've been waiting to see for almost a year."

Post-War Life in Savanna

Like most every town in America, life in Savanna after the war was filled with expectations and opportunities. Families were reunited and people got back to their normal lives. Uncle Bob Sievert got to see his three year old daughter, Joanie, for the first time. Uncle Tom was reunited with Louise and their daughter Marlyn. The town rode the wave with the entire country, a country that turned from making tanks and bombs to making cars and appliances. Post-war was a prosperous time for Savanna and it began to grow. It grew in the economic sense with new homes and schools, and it grew in population as the "baby-boomers" began to arrive.

In 1947, nine months after Dad got home, my brother Jim was born. During the same time frame, Uncle Bob and Aunt Carolyn Sievert, and Uncle Tom and Aunt Louise each had sons. These days we speak of the "baby-boomer" generation and how those born in that time are now reaching retirement. My brother Jim, cousins Bobbie Sievert and Tommy Ballas, are the quintessential baby boomers. All were born around nine months after their fathers got home from the war. It's not hard to figure out what happens when husbands and wives are reunited after a long period apart.

Things in Savanna seemed to work on schedule because about two years later, I was born along with the Sievert's second son, Ronnie.

My Mom and my aunt were pregnant at the same time with each of their first two children who were born after the war. Our immediate families were growing and life was great.

During the late 1940's, 1950's and even into the 1960's, the Ballas Family continued to grow in size and in stature. The family was one of the most well-known in town. The Ballas Tavern was the most popular and successful business of its kind with Dad having taken over full operations. Uncle Tom, on the other hand, got into the car business and was very successful. After the war, automobiles were in short supply and there was a "waiting list" people had to sign in order to buy a car. The Ford Motor Company produced the most popular models and Uncle Tom had the dealership rights to sell them. Back in those days you could have any color car you wanted, as Henry Ford said, as long as it was black. Uncle Tom capitalized on the seller's market, sold each precious car for as much as he could get, and made lots of money doing so. He eventually opened a second sales lot in a nearby town, bought several commercial properties, and became one of the wealthiest businessmen in Savanna. Uncle Junior worked with Tom and did well financially and was one of the most popular guys in town. Demetrius would have been proud of the success his three grandsons were achieving in Savanna.

Meanwhile, Uncle Louie and Aunt Annie moved back to Savanna from the farm in Antigo and, with Dad's help, started a couple building of projects. Uncle Louie was a real artist and craftsman. He could paint beautiful landscape scenes, did wonderful brick work and he could create anything out of a simple piece of wood. He used those talents in building a couple of small cottage homes and in contract jobs around town. Any fireplace, custom room addition, or remodel that Louie Ballas did in Savanna was considered the best in the town.

Louie was also the most well-liked man in town and made friends with everyone he met. At the end of the work day, he would ride up town in his old faithful "Willy's Jeep" and drop by the several of Savanna's watering holes. One in particular had a large blank wall which Louie turned into a mural. Each day, while having a few beers, he would work his magic; what was once was a boring blank wall was transformed into a masterpiece by Uncle Louie. The scene he created was of verdant valleys, well-kept barns, and fields full of horses and cows. It was not a scene duplicated from a photograph, nor was it from a real place that people recognized; it was a product of Louie's imagination. Looking back, I think Louie was drawing a picture from something he had visualized when he and his brothers bought the farmland in Wisconsin. Although their farms never looked so rich and prosperous, Louie probably thought they would when that first acreage was purchased back in 1917.

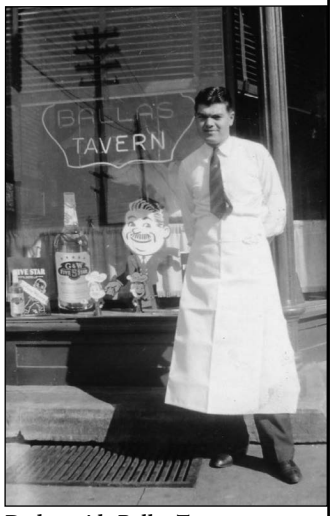
The owner of the bar where Louie painted his mural, and all its patrons, loved the work Louie did. If Louie wasn't painting on the wall, he was telling stories of the old country of Greece, stories of coming to America, and stories of life in Antigo. Everyone loved watching Louie work on

the mural and loved to listen to his stories. His predominant Greek accent and his pronunciation of certain words made his story-telling all the more interesting to the men who listened. Louie "entertained" wherever he went. My dear old Uncle Louie went to many of the bars in Savanna and no matter where he went, everyone liked him so much it seemed like he never had to pay for his beer. We all knew for a fact he would go uptown after work with fifty cents in his pocket and come home half-drunk with the same fifty cents in his pocket. Aunt Annie would wait patiently for him to come home for supper. She became annoyed at times because he would be late, but not too annoyed, because she knew Louie truly loved those visits uptown. He was really a faithful, kind, and respectful husband to his dear Annie.

Life was good for Louie in those days. He made a decent living, had a wonderful loving wife, and had more friends in town than anyone. Old Demetrius may not envisioned all of this when he brought his son to America, but his plan for a better life for his family seemed to have worked out for Louie and for all of us in Savanna.

Ballas Tavern and Ballas Pizza

The days after the war and up until the 1960's were good years for the Ballas Tavern. Men had money in their pockets and liked to spend it. They worked hard, and at the end of the day, they liked to go out and have a good time. The most popular place in town where these men could go out alone, or with their wives or girlfriends, was Ballas Tavern. It was the most friendly, clean, and safest place in town. Dad ran a tight ship just like Grandma. He never allowed drunks or raucous types in the tavern. Things never got of hand because, whenever tempers flared, Dad would diffuse things right away. At the first sign of trouble he would calmly step in and take control. Often he would say, "Come on guys, settle down... this is a family place... let me buy you all a drink and forget about it." Dad was a peacemaker, not a fighter, and his non-confrontational manner was effective.



Dad outside Ballas Tavern.

Ballas' was not the only tavern in town and there was always competition for the business. Dad ran the tavern his way, and his unique business ideas helped make it a huge success. For instance, instead of selling tap beer for a nickel a glass like all the other places in town, Dad tore out the draft beer system and sold only bottled beer. This worked to



Dad and Mom behind the bar.

his advantage in two ways; it kept out the old drunks who would buy a nickel beer and sip on it all day, and it cut down waste and losses from the poorly designed tap beer systems which leaked, smelled, and were always breaking down. I can remember him telling Joe Stompanato, his head bartender, "Joe, every time we pop open a bottle of beer, we know exactly what we are going to make…. no loss, no waste and no mess." *(I think Dad calculated a 5 cent profit on each beer that sold for around 20 cents.)*

Dad also saw potential in selling beer, liquor and wine as "carry out." He bought the building adjacent to the tavern and put in a huge carry out liquor store. He had the biggest cold beer selection in town and his was one of the few places in town that offered bags of cubed ice. This strategy paid big dividends. Savanna, known as a "sportsman's paradise," drew people from over a hundred miles to hunt, fish and boat on the Mississippi River. It was at Ballas Liquors where they stocked up on all of their beer and ice, liquor, and wine before they went out enjoy their outdoors activities.

Above all, it was Dad's introduction of Ballas Pizza that put the tavern on the map. For at least ten years, Dad tried different foods to augment the drinking side of the business. With Mom's help he tried serving home-made chili. It was very good chili, but after eating a hearty bowl of it, the guys stopped drinking; they were simply too full to have more beer. Another attempt was selling a fried chicken dinner with potatoes and salad. The chicken was a tasty success; so much so that people would order dinners for their whole family to take home. However, this would shorten their time in the tavern and overall reduce the bar tabs. Dad needed a way to keep the customers in the tavern and satisfy their hunger at the same time. On one of his many trips to visit Grandma's relatives in Chicago, he found a pizza recipe which did the trick. Dad made a couple return trips to Chicago with Grandma's brother, Tony, and gathered information on making the pizza dough and identifying the correct ingredients. After adding a personal touch (with Grandma's guidance) the Ballas Pizza was created.

A thin pizza with just the right amount of seasonings, a few tasty toppings, and cooked just right for a crispy crust, made the Ballas Pizza the biggest hit in town. It was a perfect complement to beer, mixed drinks, or wine. It was not overly filling or overly spicy. It was the kind of pizza you could eat night after night without getting tired of it. In fact, many people did just that. Railroad men on a two-night layover in Savanna would eat pizza both nights. Regulars at the tavern would have

pizza several nights a week, and our friends from high school were known to eat a Ballas Pizza every night of the week during the three summer months when school was out. *(Brother Jim and I had a couple friends in particular that if we gave them a free pizza, they would sit down and eat one every night of the week, provided Dad didn't catch us giving them away.)*

The pizza business was a booming success and a big money maker. A large 16-inch pizza, with any combination of toppings including cheese, sausage, mushroom, and onions, sold for only $1.75. The 12-inch version cost only $1.00, but with Dad's keen attention to profit margins, both offerings netted a 33% profit. That was really good money in those days. Looking back on it, the money the tavern made on pizza alone was enough to send my three brothers and me to private colleges.

The pizza also seemed to fit the "mood" Dad created for the tavern. With silky voices from the likes of Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, and Jerry Vale emanating from the old 33rpm record player Dad hooked up, the tavern took on a more mellow and "sophisticated" ambiance than any other place in town. Ballas Tavern had it all - good cold bottled beer, all the popular mixed drinks, a few select wines, a carry out liquor section, and Italian music paired with the best pizza that anyone had ever tasted.

The success and money made at the tavern came from Dad's good ideas and a lot of hard work. He worked seven days a week, and in the early years, so did Mom. Our family never took a vacation, and all of us boys worked in the tavern as well. We may have missed out on trips like other families made, we may have missed playing little league baseball and school dances, but we were members of a real family unit who worked together. If a job needed to be done, we did it for the good of the family. After a busy night, we even had to get up to clean the tavern before school. Those 6:00 am freezing cold mornings were no fun at all, but they became lessons in hard work and discipline. We were taught a work ethic that has benefited my three brothers and me throughout our lives.

Dad was extremely proud of his family and the fact that we all worked together. He bragged about "his boys" to everyone. Time after time, when we would be working in the back of the tavern doing prep work for the night's pizza, filling the beer cooler or stocking the liquor shelves, Dad would call us up to the bar. He would want to introduce his boys to all the patrons in the tavern. I'll bet that I personally shook more hands and was hugged or kissed by more strange women than I can count. Dad would introduce us, the people would make a fuss on how "cute" we were, and then we would be sent back to work. We never thought back then that the work we did to help make the tavern a success may have been in fulfillment of the dream Demetrius had for us all.

Tragedy Strikes Our Family

The post-war boom years of the 1950's saw our family prosper and grow. Savanna was a good place to raise a family and to make a living and the small farm townships around Antigo, Wisconsin, provided a healthy atmosphere for Grandpa's brothers and their children. It seemed that nothing could stop Demetrius' dream from coming to its full fruition. However, as America entered the 1960's, a world of tension and political change affected nearly everyone. Although most of us in the Ballas Family lived in small towns and were somewhat isolated from it all, we could not help but realizing that some elements of the world we lived in were very sad, cynical and violent. The 1960's saw the emergence of the Cultural Revolution. The anxiety of social and economic inequalities, fueled by a plethora of hallucinogenic drugs, free love and free thinking, contributed to America's lost innocence in the 1960's. Our country's involvement in the Vietnam War went from 700 advisory personnel in 1961 to over 500,000 armed troops by 1965. War protests took place on campuses of virtually all the colleges and universities in the country, those trying to avoid being drafted into military service (known as draft dodgers) ran off to Canada, and it became commonplace for people to openly criticize their government.

In 1960's we also saw the most appalling and shocking crimes against prominent public figures. John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States, was shot and killed in 1963. Martin Luther King, a non-violent champion of civil rights, was assassinated in 1964. Later that same year, Robert F. Kennedy, the brother of the slain President, was killed in front of millions of television viewers while he was campaigning for the presidency. The world seemed crazed.

Although we were aware of the changing world around us, the events that shook the world did not affect our family in any direct way. I think we went on with life and just tried to do the best we could. Dad, Uncle Tom and Uncle Junior were concentrating on running their businesses and raising their families. Aunt Helen's and Aunt Carolyn's husbands were hard at work. Our parents were encouraging us to "go to college" so we wouldn't have to work as hard as they did growing up. Many of us were just teenagers during the 60's; we were still in school, playing sports, and just having fun.

However, as turbulent and unsettling as the 1960's were, nothing occurred in that decade could compare to the tragedy that shook our family to the core. Around the middle of 1963, something happened to Dad. We could sense that something was not right with him. The first sign came when he had a couple minor accidents while driving his favorite pink Cadillac. Then, he started to mix up his words and had memory lapses. Later that year the reason for his mental mistakes was diagnosed. My Dad, the oldest grandson of Demetrius Ballas and leader of the first generation of American born Ballas' was diagnosed as having a large

tumor on the right side of his brain. After consultations with the local doctors, it was decided Dad's condition required a specialist. Mom and Uncle Tom took him to the famous Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. The doctors there confirmed the evidence of a tumor and recommended an immediate operation. They removed a cancerous tumor about the size of an orange, and told Mom they did the best they could. Dad was sent home without much reason for hope. In a few short months their prognosis proved correct. Cancer wielded its ugly sword and took Dad's life in February of 1964.

Words cannot describe the pain and sadness that overwhelmed our family when Dad died. For me, there was a certain fuzzy cloud that hung over me. I seemed to just walk around doing things like a robot. I went to school, tried to study and kept doing my sports. It was wrestling season at high school when Dad died in February, and as a freshman I was on the varsity team along with Brother Jim and Cousin Tommy. The marquee listing the wrestlers' names and weight classes had three Ballas' on it. It kind of made us look like real sports heroes. The three of us, Demetrius' great-grandsons, were performing in the sport of wrestling which was invented and made famous by our very own Greek forefathers. But after Dad got real sick and passed away, that kind of stuff didn't matter anymore.

I think most of the family was also in a trance for a while. Dad's funeral was so sad. I hated to see Mom cry like she did. And Grandma, poor Grandma, wailed and wailed. For a fourteen year old kid like me, it was kind of scary. All Grandma could do was to cry out, "My poor boy Jimmy…..he's gone, he's gone!" It seemed like the entire town shut down and everyone went to Dad's funeral. It was said to be the biggest funeral that Savanna ever had.

When it was all over and Dad was laid to rest, life did go on for us in Savanna. That's when Mom proved how strong of a woman she was. She continued to run the tavern and at the same time took care of us at home. Brother John was away at school when Dad died, and he wanted to immediately drop out and work in the tavern. Mom used all of her strength and resolve to convince John to stay in school. I can still remember her pleading with John, "Your father wanted you to get a college education…please don't quit now…..if you finish and you still want to be a tavern owner then that's okay, but get your education first." John agreed and did stay in school. The three of us brothers, Big Jim, Joe (only 10 years old) and me tried to help Mom as much as we could. We still were in school, but worked whenever we could to keep the tavern and pizza business going.

An Angel Among Us

Somewhere along the line, God must have had a plan for the Ballas Family in Savanna. Before that ugly tumor in Dad's head even started

to grow, Mom was pregnant with a fifth child. How nice it would be for Mom and Dad to have a little daughter to go along with us four boys. Having a little girl would really be a wonderful addition to our family. Well, our family got that addition on July 2, 1960 when Mom gave birth to a little girl. Now, this was not just any little girl, she was a "special" little girl. She was born with a condition that we knew very little about. She was born as a Mongoloid baby (at least that's what they called her condition back then). She was mentally retarded and had several handicapped features. At the time, we didn't realize this little retarded child was really a "gift". She was a gift from God that carried a message for us all. The message was that we are not perfect, and any good in our lives, as well as any bad, comes from the direction of God.



Mom with her "angel on earth" and the Catholic nun that brought the news that God had sent the gift of a special child.

When Mom gave birth at the Catholic hospital in Clinton, Iowa, the nuns gingerly entered her room to tell her the news. The news that her little baby girl was a "special child." They told her that her life would never be the same again because raising a child like this was a huge responsibility. Mom was dazed and confused. What did all this mean? How special was her baby? What kind of handicap did she have? Preoccupied with this shocking news, naming her little girl was a difficult thing to concentrate on. It was at that point the nuns softly mentioned to Mom that July 2nd, the day she gave birth was the Feast of the Visitation, which is the day commemorating Mary the Mother of God's visit to her cousin Elizabeth to tell her she was pregnant with the Christ-child. *(The feast of the Visitation was celebrated on July 2nd until 1969, after that* time *the church moved it to May 31st. Our family continues to remember July 2nd as a "special" date for our special angel that was born among us.)* Mom put this together and, with the Grace of God, came up with a perfect name: Mary Beth *(Mary for Mother Mary, and Beth, short for Elizabeth).*

The whole family, including Dad, we brothers, our aunts and uncles as well as cousins did not know how to react to the news Mary Beth was not a normal child. It was said she was mentally retarded. We didn't know anything about this. In a way, we thought life was always full of good things, we felt that because we were Ballas' we were somehow special and privileged. We thought having a retarded or handicapped baby only happened to other people. We did not understand any of this.

It took a while for us to understand and accept Mary Beth as a true "gift" from God and to realize we were lucky to have her in our lives. Some of us realized it and embraced this gift sooner than others, but eventually all of our immediate and extended family members discovered

how special she really was. Mary Beth was undoubtedly one of God's angels. This angel, in the form of a poor helpless little baby, brought us more knowledge and understanding of life than we could have ever gained on our own. Mary Beth made us a more open and understanding of others. She taught us to be forgiving and to be kind to those less fortunate. She taught us patience, love, and humility, and she taught us love.

These lessons in real life which came with God's gift came slowly. When Mary Beth came home from the hospital we all went through an adjustment period. We learned that her condition, which is now referred to as Down Syndrome, came with certain genetic characteristics. Our little girl had a very weak heart which was abnormally large in size. Her heart also had to two holes in it and two abnormal valves. Her muscle tone was extremely weak, she couldn't hold her head up and she didn't even have the strength to suck the nipple on a feeding bottle. We had to pick her up very gently and hold her head so it would not snap back. Feeding her was a real challenge. Mom taught us how to squeeze an eye dropper of milk down the side of her mouth in hopes that she would swallow it. We didn't measure how much she drank in ounces; rather we measured in droppers full. If she got down a couple cc's of milk in one sitting she was doing really well.

As we all know, life had to go on and we had to still do the normal things in life. Dad was always busy at the tavern. We boys had school and work. And, of course, Mom had to take care of the home, but now with a child with special needs. With all our busy schedules, we gradually learned the life lessons that came with our little angel. Instead of being ashamed of having a retarded child, we learned to embrace her. We learned to be open and willing to share with others how much joy she could bring to a family. When people stared at her because of her peculiar Down Syndrome characteristics, unusually round face, almond shaped eyes, protruding tongue, and flat hands and feet, we tried to minimize her differences and treat her as normal as possible. It was Mom who set the example for all of us. The key to everyone accepting Mary Beth as part of the family was Mom's strong faith in God and her insistence that her little girl be raised at home. Even when the pastor at our church told Mom, "Rosemary, give her up to a home for the handicapped. You have four boys at home that need your attention…..she will be too difficult for you to handle." Mom remained steadfast and refused to allow Mary Beth to be raised by anyone but us.

God's angel brought us closer together as a family. Sure, we were already working together in a team effort at the tavern, but this was different. We all had to stick up for her and be there for her. We knew that her survival depended on all of us working together. It sort of simplified life because there was no choice when it came to Mary Beth. She was helpless, so it was up to us to help her.

It is also now very obvious that even though Mary Beth needed our help, she came to this earth to render help to us. She was here to help

us deal with the tragedy of Dad's death. Mary Beth was only four years old when Dad got sick. She was still not able to walk or talk and was always getting sick with colds and pneumonia due to her weak heart and problems with her respiratory system. Even so, when Dad first came home from the hospital after his operation, she would crawl on her butt and bring him a towel to wipe his runny nose and mouth. This little Down Syndrome child was born with an innate sense of caring. She tried to help her poor father who could not help himself. Dad was not cognitively aware of all that was going on with his health and the things around him, but when he looked at Mary Beth you could see a little twinkle in his eye. I think he knew he was looking at the face of an angel and through her "specialness" she helped put Dad in a peaceful state of mind.

When the tragedy of death strikes a family it can sometimes tear them family apart. The presence of Mary Beth in our lives did not allow that to happen. Life was never the same without Dad, but somehow Mary Beth helped us focus, move on, and make the best out of life. She may have been weak and helpless, but she was the glue that held us together.

Children with Down Syndrome like Mary Beth are born about five times in 10,000 births. They can be difficult at times, sickly and require a huge amount of attention. It's really a full-time job raising a child like this, and it continues to be amazing that Mom raised Mary Beth, took care of four sons, and ran the tavern all on her own. Mom most assuredly got her strength from Mary Beth and from the simple fact that the job had to be done.

The angel among us also touched the lives of many other people. Our friends and neighbors got to know her and grew to love her. She added joy to those in the group home where she lived for many years, and all of her teachers and counselors became personally close to her. *(Mary Beth lived in a wonderful group home in her later years after my brothers and I left home for college and our jobs in California.)* The doctors warned us that she may only live to be six to nine years old because of all the problems with her heart, but God's little angel fooled them all. She live to be 29 years old and enjoyed life way beyond what was predicted. She was a happy and content young lady who loved to laugh and was infatuated with movie stars, television, and music. Although the experts say that Down Syndrome children do not inherit many family traits, Mary Beth was an exception. She was all Ballas, full of charm, personality, kindness, and clever wit.



Mary Beth and her Mother.

We all learned from Mary Beth and learned to accept life without Dad. We re-

alized that life has many unpredictable twists and turns and that somehow, and in some way, we were destined to fulfill Demetrius' dream and make a better life for our family.

Chapter 4

Life for Those Who Remained in Greece

In general, Demetrius' dream for a better life was fulfilled for his sons who left Greece. The Ballas boys struggled during the early days of their immigration to America, but ultimately their efforts paid dividends. They acquired businesses and farms and placed themselves in the position to share the prosperity the United States enjoyed after World War II. However, for those who remained in Greece, Christos, Theodoros and their families, life was entirely different. They lived in a country which suffered an economic down-turn because of its involvement in World War I, an even worse economic depression during the 1930's, and the occupation of Hitler's army during World War II. Greece did not prosper like the U.S. and other countries after the war ended. It did not have the means to improve its economic condition or the ability to repair the infrastructure required to support its agricultural based economy.

Old Demetrius' returned to Greece in 1917 and it appears his plan for a better life for his family was still in process. He wanted one more of his boys to have the chance at life in America. Around 1920, he accompanied his two youngest sons to the port city of Patras. This small coastal city became the main port for ferries traveling from Greece to Italy. Its location on the western most part of the Peloponnesus (about 150 kilometers from Kiato), provided the shortest route across the Ionian Sea and to Italy. The old man's idea was to send Christos to America to join his brothers and to keep his youngest son, Theodoros, with him in Kiato to take of the family property. Just as Demetrius and Theodoros were saying their goodbyes to Christos, he spoiled his father's plans. The poor young boy just refused to go; he didn't want to leave his mother, father and younger brother. He didn't want to leave his home in Kiato. The story goes that he cried so much, Demetrius gave up all attempts to persuade him to board the ferry.

The three of them had to turn around and go home. When they arrived back in Kiato, Christos' tears turned to joy when he saw his mother, Eleni. The boy's homecoming was bittersweet for her - Christos was back, but he had lost the opportunity to find a better life in America. As it turned out, Christos and Theodoros remained in Kiato for their entire lives, never to be reunited with their brothers. They worked the family farm with their parents, barely scratching out a sustenance living. After Demetrius died in 1933, they were on their own. If either of them had any ideas or desires to try to go to America, a dramatic change in world events made that impossible.

September 1, 1939, a day that changed the political landscape of the world forever, determined their fate. On this, the most infamous day in world history, Adolf Hitler began his quest for world dominance when his German forces invaded Poland. A series of further aggression by Germany in Europe, and by Japan in Asia, brought the entire world into World War II. Germany's reign of terror had no boundaries. Seven months before the U.S. entered the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, German forces moved onto Greece and Yugoslavia. The invasion of these

two countries was the final strategic move as part of Germany's Balkan Invasion. No city or country in Eastern Europe was safe, including our family village of Kiato.

Germany's plan to dominate these countries required the securing of supply lines and a steady source of food for their troops. Kiato's seaport, railroad lines, and agricultural base made it a prime target for the German army. By the summer of 1942, Germany had a seemingly insurmountable hold on the area. Young men were rounded up and sent to work camps, while women and children were forced to work the fields cultivating the crops to feed the occupying German army. People who did not cooperate suffered from German cruelty. Most of the inhabitants of Kiato lived in fear and were rendered to near starvation because their occupiers took all available food for themselves. Our family in Kiato has personal knowledge of the German occupation. Louie Ballas, Theodoros' oldest son, recounted to me the following story on my latest visit to Greece in the fall of 2012:

"When I was about 8 or 9 years old, I remember the Germans setting up camp just a few blocks from our house. It was down by the railroad tracks that we first saw the Germans come into town. They took over the train station and the school across the street. At that time, we only had one school for children of my age. It was this two story building that the Germans used as housing for officers. The regular soldiers camped in tents and some just slept outside. As kids, we were very curious and would go down to see the soldier camps. For the most part, they did not bother us and would sometimes give up scraps of food leftover from their meals. We were all very hungry at that time, so any bit of food that they gave us was dear. My uncle, Christos, and my father, Theodoros, were not able to be seen by the Germans. They were afraid they would have to go and work in their factories in Germany or other places. I remember the hole in the ground under the stables in the back of our house my uncle and Dad hid in. They had a small air tube that stuck up from the pile of hay that covered the hole. Mom would bring them food, if there was any, and we were told never to go near the hiding place because the Germans might find them.

One day, when my brothers and sisters and I were begging for food from the Germans, one of them got mad and kicked over one of the small fire pots that they had around the camp. The pot was full of hot kerosene and it burned my leg. I was burned pretty badly, but there was nothing anyone could do against the Germans. They were all over our town. One day they came and took over the only separate room in our house for one of the soldiers to sleep in. Everyone was scared of the Germans.

The stories of German cruelty during WWII and Hitler's strategy for world domination are well documented by historians. Germany was determined to rule the world on its own terms. It was ruthless, and controlled occupied territories through fear and intimidation. The smaller countries resisted, but to no avail. In the case of Greece, which did not possess much of a standing army, resistance was largely made up



Cousin Louie showing where his leg was burned by the Germans.

of guerilla forces and guerilla tactics. Our village of Kiato manned its own resistance force and used the natural surroundings to gain a strategic advantage. The guerilla fighters used similar tactics as those used by the anti-Turkish fighters during the Ottoman period in the 1400's. Facing superior forces, harsh mountainous conditions, and the lack of food and clothing, the guerilla forces still fought bravely. They would hide in the hills, attack, and then pull back for cover. Just as the anti-Turkish fighters before them, some of the resistance fighters attained almost "folk-hero" status. However, the German answer to resistance was merciless and its methods to deter guerilla activity were inhumane. In Kiato, the German commanders used the rail line and trains that ran directly through town as mechanisms to demonstrate their response to any resistance by the locals. For every single German soldier killed by the guerillas, 15 young Greek men were captured, tortured, and tied to the front of the train engine to be paraded slowly through town for all to see. The older citizens of today's Kiato who witnessed this atrocity still retain this horrible memory of seeing the train engine littered with dead bodies slowly grinding through town.

If it wasn't for the clever hiding place, and perhaps luck of our uncles, Christos and Theodoros, they too could have been victims of this German cruelty. The resistance fighting went on for nearly two years. It finally ended when Germany was forced to leave the occupied countries of Greece and Yugoslavia after suffering defeats in Eastern Europe in 1943.



Animal stalls where Christos and Theodoros hid from the Germans during the war.

The cruelness of war did claim one of our own in Greece. Demetrius' son, Con, who returned to Greece from America after he was injured on the railroad, died during the war. A very sad circumstance led to his death. It seems he was deeply affected by the injury he sustained while working on the railroad and was

tormented by the sound of the trains that passed through town. When he heard a train coming, he would run out of the house and chase after it. The police felt he was a danger and should be institutionalized. So, Con was sent to Athens to live in a sanitarium. The devastating collateral effects of the war claimed one of Demetrius' and Eleni's boys; Con Ballas died in Athens of starvation in 1942.

Post-War in Kiato

With the end of World War II, the war-torn countries tried to rebuild. Many countries in central Europe were aided by the Marshall Plan, while the Southern and Eastern European countries had to fend for themselves. *(The Marshall Plan was the American program to aid Europe, in which the United States gave economic support to help rebuild European economies in order to prevent the spread of Soviet Communism. The initiative was named after Secretary of State, George Marshall.)* In the case of Greece, money came from a central fund, but was not nearly enough to do the job. Small cities, like our beloved Kiato, received very little help. For the Ballas Family, money and food was scarce and each day was dedicated to survival. Fortunately, the land Old Demetrius had purchased on his return trips from America provided the means for the family to grow enough fruits and vegetables to keep them from starving. These were extremely tough times for our family, and it was during this time our family in America came to the aid of our family in Greece. Grandpa John and Grandma Lucy knew the obvious struggles of our family living over 5,000 miles away and tried to help the best they could. Grandma would gather clothing and food staples, like flour and sugar, and send them over to Greece in a steamer trunk. It did not seem like much at the time, but the arrival of the trunk filled with necessities saved the family. According to Bill Ballas, son of Uncle Christos, the trunk from America was received with great anticipation:

"We were always hungry and hardly had clothes to wear. I can remember when they notified us at the train station that a trunk had arrived for the Ballas Family. Either my Dad or Uncle Theodoros would go down to the station and pick it up. We all would gather around while it was opened with care. My Mother and Auntie Anna would take charge and begin to separate things. They would first take out the food; like flour, sugar, powdered milk and other dry goods and keep them safe. Then they would take each piece of clothing out and spread it on the table or floor with the utmost of care, treating each as if it was woven of precious fabric. Then, from oldest to youngest, each of us kids would get to pick something out. It seemed at the time, that anything from America was special and whether it was a shirt or jacket or just a pair of socks, we would wear it with pride. Anything coming from America was better than anything we could get in Greece. Once in a while there was some money at the bottom of the trunk; just a few coins or a

dollar bill. The empty trunk was put aside and as soon as there was enough money saved to pay for its return, my Dad would ship the empty trunk back, addressed to: John Ballas, Savanna, Illinois, United States of America."

Today, a trunk full of food and clothes doesn't seem like much to us. But back then, it was a godsend to the family in Greece. When Uncle Junior and I traveled to Greece with Grandma Lucy and her sister, Aunt Annie, we realized just how much the trunk meant to them. Uncles Christos and Theodoros, and their wives, Forta and Anna, couldn't stop thanking Grandma Lucy for her efforts during those tough times. They literally worshiped her. Somehow they knew Grandma was the one that made it all happen. They knew it was her hard work and generosity which filled that trunk. You could tell for them, the trunk not only contained necessary food and clothing, but also represented an expression of love from the American family.

(On my first visit to Greece in 1972, I remember seeing an old beat-up steamer trunk in the back storage shed behind Christos' house, it is obvious to me now that this old trunk I saw was the one that made the round-trips from America to Greece).

By the end of the war, Uncles Christos and Theodoros had a huge responsibility to care for their respective families. They both had eight children, most named after family members and in the Greek tradition. Christos' children were named: Demetrius (Jim), Vlasis (Bill), Eleni (Helen), Dionysius (Denis), Nota, Kostas (Con), Soula (Suzie) and Elias (Leo). Theodoros' children were named: Elias (Louie), Eleni (Helen), Maria (Mary), Evdokia (Eva), Sotiris (Sam), Demetrius (Jim), Aristos (Harry), and Kostas (Con).

These 16 children had very little to live on and there was not much hope for the future. All the Ballas children worked the land and thus many of them missed out on the opportunity to go to school. Life was certainly different for the Ballas' in Greece compared to their brothers and cousins in America.

Chapter 5

The Ballas Migration to California

Ah, California! The "Golden State" the land of milk and honey. California possesses the most beautiful, natural scenery in the world, the most unique and varied geography, and the home of Hollywood and movie stars. It is a place where dreams come true. In California, you can snow ski in the morning in some of the best powder in the world, and then drive to the beach the same day for an afternoon dip in the ocean.

California was indeed the land of opportunity. At the end of World War II, only 10 million people lived there. It had clear skies, fresh air, and a perfect climate, making it fertile ground for development. Uncle Junior realized the opportunity and growth potential of California and became the first of our family to explore it. He didn't go out there to snow ski or play in the ocean; nor did he go to see movie stars. Junior went to follow his own dream for a better life for his family, sort of a personal extension of the grand plan that old Demetrius had when he migrated to America. Junior, the impetuous and extremely intelligent uncle of mine, was also fulfilling his own craving for adventure. Following his innate sense of travel and risk taking, Uncle Junior left a comfortable life in Savanna to search for something different, something better.

Uncle Junior's move to California took a rather circuitous route. Initially, he left Savanna with the idea to continue his formal education by pursuing an advanced degree in International Business. In 1962, just after his fourth child, Paul, was born, Junior enrolled in the Institute of Foreign Trade, a graduate school for international business. Junior possessed the necessary background to attend a school of this type because he majored in Business Management and Spanish at Notre Dame. Located in a suburb of Phoenix, Arizona, this graduate school was geared to those wishing to pursue a career with major corporations which had operations outside of the United States. Junior excelled at this school, he found it easy and fun, and with his ability to speak fluent Spanish, he was assured of a job at a major corporation upon graduation. However, the Ballas sense for adventure and risk took precedence, as did the immediate need to provide for his family. Just before final exams were to be held at the Arizona school, Uncle Junior got a call from a friend in California. The friend boasted about the opportunities there and about the good money that could be made. The friend promised a job in mobile home sales in Covina, California, a growing community outside of Los Angeles. Looking at his options; a possible entry level position with a corporation, or working for good money right away, Uncle Junior chose the latter and left school near the end of the term. He did so well in his studies that the president of the international school awarded him a degree in spite of the fact he never took his final exams.

Uncle Junior's experience gained from selling cars in Savanna, his business acumen, and good old Ballas "charm" served him well. He learned the mobile home business quickly and made money right away as a top salesman. Colleen and the four kids were with him as the first of

the Ballas' set down stakes in California.

Meanwhile, back in Savanna, Uncle Tom was doing extremely well, but nonetheless, started to get the "itch" to check out the opportunities in the Golden State. He made a few trips to visit Junior and quickly put together an aggressive plan to move to California to enter the mobile home business. He found a large sales lot in Anaheim, California which had huge potential, but was struggling financially. The lot was called "Rick Baldino's Home of Mobile World" and had a huge globe on the sign in front. It was in a great location and had plenty of room for inventory. Uncle Tom had the cash to buy out the owner, made an offer, and soon became the owner of one of the biggest mobile home sales lots in California. Of course, Uncle Junior then left Covina and joined his brother. They used a similar methodology that worked in the car business back in Savanna, and quickly made money.



The Mobile World Sales Lot. Jeff, Junior, Jim, Tom and Joe.

Uncle Tom Builds an Empire

Tom wasn't satisfied with owning just one sales lot. He found other struggling lots that were mismanaged, but located in high traffic areas. He bought them, cleaned them up and changed them into "Mobile World" lots. When the dust settled, Uncle Tom and Uncle Junior owned five sales lots in Orange County, in the cities of Anaheim, Santa Ana, Garden Grove, Stanton and Huntington Beach, and two more lots in the high desert towns of Beaumont and Hesperia. Word travelled back to Savanna and prompted a few of Tom and Junior's old buddies to come out to California and work for them.

In a few short years after establishing a strong foothold in the mobile home sales business, Uncle Tom became involved in another aspect of the mobile home business - mobile home parks. These communities where mobile homes were permanently "parked" were very lucrative operations. The home owners paid a monthly rent for the site that provided them water and utility hook-ups. A mobile park housing 200 to 300 units brought in a huge monthly cash flow. Uncle Tom bought existing parks and actually built his own from raw land to a finished product. Although he had no formal education in design or engineering, Tom Ballas laid out his own designs for his parks incorporating the most efficient use of the land. He packed as many homes as he could in a given space and reaped the benefits of using every available space. With a control over the sales of the mobile home itself, he was able to direct

his customers into one of his parks, and he filled them quickly. Uncle Tom liked control, and he was establishing it in the southern part of California through hard work and a keen sense on how to build a business.

Around 1970, Uncle Tom commenced one of the most aggressive business ventures of his life. Up until that time, he had been purchasing the mobile homes that he sold on the retail lots from various manufacturers. These manufacturers were large corporate affairs and were making huge money in a growing business. Tom wanted a piece of this action, too. He figured it didn't take rocket science to build mobile homes, so he found an old abandoned building which once had been a recreational vehicle plant, retrofitted it for his purposes, and began building his own homes. The grandson of Demetrius Ballas had just completed the ultimate step in creating an empire. By cutting out a middle man and building his own homes, he controlled all three parts of the mobile home industry. Building them, selling them, and placing them in his parks. At the same time, he created a dealer network and began selling his own manufactured homes to mobile home dealers throughout California. This was an aggressive move and in direct competition with the long established large manufacturers. Not bad for a young man who was following up an old Greek's dream for a better life for his family.

We Nephews Join the Empire

Uncle Junior worked with Tom as the business grew. They worked together in strategy and design for the sales lots, parks, and the factory. Only one of their good friends from Savanna stayed for the long haul and worked many years for Tom. The rest came and went. Tom was very demanding and friend or not, if you didn't work hard and at least seven days a week, you were gone. The work ethic Tom demanded created a lot of turnover with employees, but Tom didn't care. He was a hands-on boss and could literally do everything all on his own if any of his employees walked away and quit. But, like any Ballas, family was very important to Uncle Tom and he demonstrated that by inviting all of his nephews to work for him. No mistake about it, you still had to put in a super-human effort to work for him. We nephews were given the opportunity and it was up to us individually to make the best of it. The first of us nephews to come to California to work in "Tom's Empire" was my brother, Big Jim. With no experience whatsoever, Jim started selling mobile homes on one of the lots in Anaheim. This was around 1970 just before the mobile home factories came on line. Big Jim had personality and presence, but he really had no idea how to sell a mobile home off a retail sales lot. However, he learned from the master, his Uncle Tom, and when he got his first commission check for $1,000, Big Jim thought he was rolling in dough.

Working for his uncles presented a huge challenge for Big Jim. Tom was merciless in his criticism if a sale got away or if things weren't

neat and clean around the lots. Uncle Junior, on the other hand, had the more easy going personality and would calm things down once the smoke cleared from one of Tom's rants.

The California mobile home business was really growing in the early 1970's and more of us jumped on the bandwagon. Bobbie Sievert had just gotten out of the military service around that time, and after a stint in Maine, found California to his liking. He became involved in the transport and set-up of the mobile homes and was later joined by his brother, Ronnie. The Sieverts did well. They arranged for the homes to be transported to the park, and then would obtain the permits required for crews to set the homes on the foundation blocks and complete the utility and water connections. Cousin Tommy, Uncle Tom's son, worked for his Dad and then went on his own and created a separate business selling and installing exterior accessories for the homes. Tommy's business dealt with the steps, porches and awnings which were installed after the home was set-up its park space.

By 1972, Uncle Tom had two mobile home factories operating, one to service the dealers in Southern California and the other to service Northern California. Located in towns of Ontario and Manteca, respectively, the factories were in poorer areas where labor was cheap. Around 1972, I was luckily spared from being drafted into the Vietnam War, and found my way to California as well. At that time, Big Jim was working in the factory in Manteca and convinced me that a good job waited. I came out to visit Jim and see the factory, and with no particular intention to move to California, I started working right away. Twenty years later I still called California my home.

When Jim and I worked together we had to learn the business from the ground up. We learned on the job, without prior experience in factory operations, assembly lines or managing a workforce of close to fifty people. After only a few months on the job, we were put in charge of the entire plant. The plant managers and supervisors who had been hired to run the plant couldn't measure up to the demands of Tom Ballas. They wilted from the pressure and eventually quit. He pushed and pushed for more production and demanded perfection. Big Jim and I were left to make a go of it.

Working in Manteca was pure hell! Located in the Central Valley of California, the climate was hot and dry. We worked twelve hour days, sometimes six days a week, with temperatures inside the plant reaching 115 degrees. Probably the only thing that helped us keep our sanity was that Uncle Tom was not at the plant every day. He would be in Southern California for most of the time running the sales lots and the factory. About once a week, he would fly his own private plane up to check on us. Those days were a real challenge! We used to have one of the guys who worked in the outside yard of the plant keep an eye out for the Tom's plane. When he saw it coming he would get on the loud speaker and announce: "Uncle Tom just buzzed the plant and he'll be

here soon". Plant workers, including Jim and I, knew from experience that if things in the plant weren't up to shape, the big boss would raise hell. We scurried around like scared rabbits, cleaning things up the best we could and holding our breath. Tom was relentless in his demands. He wanted more production, better quality, and a clean and orderly plant. He had the uncanny ability to make on-point assessments of our operations before he even arrived at the plant. It was as if he could see right through the roof of the plant when he did his fly over approaches and spot our deficiencies. Looking back it seems comical, but we took a lot of grief from Uncle Tom. He he was the toughest S.O.B. in the world. At the same time, he was extremely successful, and allowed us to share in his success. Big Jim and I were paid well and we learned how to run a business better than anyone else.

Sometimes Uncle Tom stayed overnight on those weekly trips, at which time we had a chance to go out to dinner and relax a little. Although business was always on his mind, we did see glimpses of a calmer, gentler Uncle Tom. It was evident he truly loved his family, especially his Mother. He knew what loyalty and trust were all about and he rewarded a job well done.

Once in a while the conversation would come up about one of us boys, or even one of his sons, furthering their education. When we talked to Tom about college or advanced degrees, he would quip, "Hey boys, working for me is just like going to college, except you're getting paid for it!" He then followed up his little saying with a cocky smile, like he thought he was smarter than any college professor that we would encounter.

The factories were the real money makers. By the mid 1970's Tom built a brand new plant for the southern region with greater production capacity and more modern equipment. When the new plant was up and running, it produced 20 complete double wide homes per week. The profit margin for units built in Tom's plants was the highest in the industry. With his tutelage, we maintained the lowest labor rate in the industry. The labor rate figure was the "quintessential" Tom Ballas, he demonstrated that he could get the more out of his employees than anyone else could out of theirs.

Tom's genius showed further in his selection of the name for the manufacturing company. He chose a name that he felt elicited trust and reliability. Under the name of "Madison Mobile-Modular Homes", Tom Ballas became a big player in the mobile home industry. The independent dealers, now numbering over 30 in the northern part of the state and over 50 in the southern, carried our line of mobile homes under the model names of Madison, Jefferson, Lincoln and Washington. The tag-line for our marketing literature was "The Presidential Line". Where did Tom come up with the idea to use past U.S. President's names? Names which people were comfortable with and seemed like they were from a long established company? Our only guess is that his route from Orange County

to Ontario, where the first factory was located, took him through the city of Corona. A section of that city had off-ramps for streets named; Madison, Jefferson, Lincoln and Washington. The names must have had a nice "ring" to them and Tom took it from there. With no formal education in marketing or manufacturing, Uncle Tom had built a sophisticated empire.

More of the Family in California

Even before Tom and Junior got things rolling in the Golden State, some of the Ballas' had already escaped the frigid winters of Wisconsin and found their way to California. The first to make it out there was old Uncle Pete. Now Pete was kind of a loner, the fourth son of Demetrius, he worked with his brothers on the railroad and operated a restaurant in Chicago. Pete never married and for some unknown reason left his brothers and went out to Los Angeles. It is not known precisely when Pete made his move, but our best guess is sometime in the late 1950's or early 1960's. Pete did not speak very good English and he had trouble coping with life in a strange city. He lived in a poor rundown apartment and probably drank a little too much. Before I finished school and made the permanent move to Northern California, I went out west to visit Uncle Junior and Uncle Tom. Big Jim was already there, and to the best of my recollection, we all went to Los Angeles to see how Pete was doing. Tom and Junior must have known Pete was living on the edge; and that is exactly how we found him. We went by his small apartment but he wasn't at home. One of his neighbors thought he would be back soon, so we waited. Late in the afternoon he showed up and explained that he had been at the movies all day. As things developed, it was apparent that Pete was a bit "different." He claimed he went to double feature movies every day and enjoyed them a great deal. In a matter-of-fact manner, Pete said it was the best way for him to learn English. He also said he learned all about the world through movies and he had become an "educated" man! Tom and Junior bought him dinner and a few groceries (his cupboards and refrigerator were bare). It was quite sad to see old Uncle Pete living alone and poor. I guess he wanted it that way and was content with his own life.

For me, the best memory of that visit is when Pete showed some of the Ballas spark that is in all of us. In the broken English that he "learned" from going to the movies, he passed on some rather good advice to my brother. Impressed with Big Jim's height and muscles, Pete smiled and said to him, "With your good looks and good physique, you should grow a mustache, learn to tap dance, and you'll make it big in the movies." Pete was serious and he was convinced he knew the key to making it in the movie industry. *(On a side note, Big Jim has had a moustache for most of his life, but as of this date he has yet to learn how to tap dance!)*

Old Uncle Pete passed away when he was in his eighties. Uncle Junior and Gus (the next paragraph discusses how Gus came to be in

Santa Barbara) found out and claimed Pete's body and arranged for him to be buried in Santa Barbara, California.

In addition to Tom and Junior, another one of Demetrius' grandsons got the urge to travel and explore new opportunities. This was Gus, the son of Bill and Christina. Gus headed west in 1963 with his first stop being Las Vegas, Nevada. Jobs were plentiful there and Gus had the chance to stay and work; however, he took an invite from a friend in Pismo Beach, California and left Las Vegas to check out further opportunities. He had no particular intentions on staying, but thought he owed it to his wife, Boots, and their children to see how work and the lifestyle in California compared to Wisconsin. From Pismo Beach, he explored the coastal communities and ended up in Santa Barbara. Just to gauge the pulse of the job market, he talked to the union office representing the grocery and meat cutting industry. He quickly found out that jobs were available and the money was good. It didn't take Gus long to figure out that the quality of life in California was going to be better for his family and he could he make more money than in Wisconsin. Besides, the weather in the beautiful town of Santa Barbara, where he settled, was fantastic. Gus and Boots moved with their son Gus Junior (Gusty) and their two girls (Connie and Tina), and made the West Coast their home. Gus settled in and became a butcher in a family-owned grocery store. He mastered his craft and worked for the same store owner for 17 years. Gus was the best known butcher in Santa Barbara, enjoyed his interaction with his customers, and made many friends. Gus and Boots had a fourth child, Billy, and became fully immersed in the California lifestyle.

Gus' brother, Jim, eventually joined them around 1970, and lived in Santa Barbara the rest of his life. Jim was married but did not have children of his own.

With the mobile home business centered in the Orange County region of Southern California, Uncle Tom and Uncle Junior made that part of Southern California a permanent home for their families. California life was good. Uncle Junior's four kids, J.D., Ann, Julie and Paul learned to adapt to their new home quickly. They were good students and they were active in extracurricular activities (Colleen's was very involved in the children's education, she was a teacher at our small Catholic elementary school in Savanna. In fact, she taught my fourth grade class.) The kids participated in sports such swimming, water polo, and soccer. These were sports which would not have been available had they stayed in a small town like Savanna and validated the concept that California had more to offer in many aspects of life.

In 1970, Junior and Colleen had their fifth child, Patrick, named appropriately because he was born on Saint Patrick's Day. Colleen is Irish, so the day of Patrick's birth was very special for their family.

As the years went by and Junior's kids took to the nearby beaches where they surfed and boogie-boarded the waves, they fully became a "California" family. Junior's children inherited the intelligence of their

father and mother. They were very bright and did well in high school as well as college. Their formal education took them to more traditional careers than those of us who grew up in the Savanna area. They did not find the need to search for a better life because they already had it. California provided endless opportunities. The first born son, J.D. (John Demetrius), followed his father and attended Notre Dame. He excelled in civil engineering and upon graduation quickly landed a job back in California. Before long, J.D. became the Chief Engineer for the City of Industry. This prestigious job made him one of the first Ballas' of his generation to succeed in a professional career.

Junior's second child, Ann, also pursued a professional career. She entered the United States Navy in the hopes of becoming a navy nurse. With a ton of hard work and self-sacrifice she achieved her goal and reached the rank of Major in U.S. Navy as a registered nurse specializing in trauma emergency services.

The career paths that J.D. and Ann followed were a clear indication that not all Ballas' were destined to start their own businesses. They also proved that it was not always necessary to be on the move searching for a better life. The sacrifices their great grandfather, Demetrius, their grandfather, John, and their father, Junior, made for their sake allowed them to pursue careers goals going well beyond the imagination of those who came before them.

Near the end of the 1970's

By the end of the decade of the 1970's, California was home to many of us great grand-children of Demetrius. My youngest brother, Joe, joined Big Jim and me in the northern mobile home factory after he graduated from college. Joe quickly adapted to California life and to the workload that Uncle Tom placed upon us.

Finally, our oldest brother, John, saw the light and moved to California from the frigid winters of Ohio with his wife, Paulette, and their three lovely daughters. They arrived in California in the summer of 1976 and immediately found Southern California to their liking. John found a home in Yorba Linda, a beautiful little city in Orange County, and the family soon acclimated to the California lifestyle. They joined the local tennis and social club, and Paulette made friends fast. The three girls, Bridgette, Lisa and Beth Anne fit perfectly in their new environment and didn't miss a beat. They were active in swimming, soccer and tennis, just like native-born Californians.

John made some good decisions in his life and moving to California was one of them. It was a perfect place for him to raise his family. He worked exclusively at the southern factory in Ontario in sales and marketing. This required him to face the "wrath" of Uncle Tom on a daily basis. John had a strong personality which made his interactions with his uncle very interesting to say the least. John and Tom would frequently

have heated arguments. Tom wanted things done his way while John would choose to do things a bit differently. I think John would often challenge Tom on a given point just to get under his skin. It was often comical the way the two went at each other. The bottom line is that the job got done, and they grew to respect each other. Would Tom have put up with a stranger acting the way John did? Perhaps not.

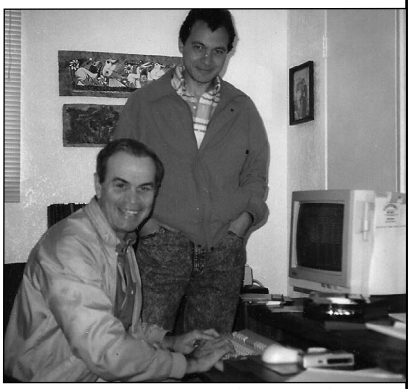
Looking back on it, the interaction that Uncle Tom had with John, Jim and Joe and me was his attempt to be the father we did not have. I personally thank him for his efforts, albeit he could have done it in a more kind and gentle manner. I will say this about Uncle Tom; he knew hard work was not a choice, but an absolute requirement in order to be successful. I am grateful for what he taught my brothers and me in this regard.

Uncle Junior also was there for us when we, one by one, moved to California. However, he had a different personality than his brother, Tom, and his relationship with us was different. Junior took the loss of his oldest brother which left us four brothers fatherless as an opportunity to create a unique bond with us. He treated us with love, respect and with a mentoring approach. Our Uncle Junior was not only the most generous man we had ever met, but also our best friend. He was a person we could confide in and a father to us all. I'm sure my Dad was smiling down whenever Uncle Junior, his little brother, stepped up and helped us acclimate to California and guided us to become men. It is very difficult to put into words how grateful we are to Uncle Junior for all he did for us.

Uncle Junior was also one of the most entertaining and fun people that anyone ever met. He enjoyed meeting people, making friends and often would stop by a bar for a drink. Being with him was really a treat. The place didn't have to be fancy or anything too special, just a place to hang out, drink, and maybe shoot a game of pool. Junior may have over done his drinking at times and at one point it did become a problem. He was forced by his own actions to make a choice; either continue drinking and going out, or stay home and take care of his commitment to being a husband and father. Uncle Junior got the message loud and clear, and without making a big deal about it, joined Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) where he quit drinking altogether. That is perhaps the most admirable thing about him. He sacrificed one of the things he enjoyed most in life for the sake of his wife and children.

At first, we who used to enjoy his company at the bars and night spots thought he wouldn't be any more fun. How wrong we were! The fun loving, engaging Uncle Junior did not change at all. His personality, in its entire splendor, did not need alcohol to reveal itself. Our Uncle Junior, friend to all, was the same man, drink or not. In many respects he was even more fun and had more to offer because he had more energy after he quit drinking. He put his energy to good use and offered his time to do charitable works. In particular, he used his ability to understand computers and volunteered at the St. Vincent DePaul Society to rebuild old com-

puters and give them to the poor. Junior's home garage didn't have room in it to park his car; it was full of hard drives, monitors, cables and various computer parts. If you needed to find Uncle Junior you didn't have to look beyond his garage where he could be found tinkering with those damn computers. How did he learn the intricacies of computer repair and how did he understand the programming that was required to fire up an old outdated computer? He just learned it on his own by using the manufacturer's manuals and his own brain power. Junior turned his nervous "Ballas" energy into helping those less fortunate. Those who received the re-built Uncle Junior computers would have a tool necessary to help them with job searches, applications and to even develop skills they would need in the new computer age. Junior also put his foreign language skill to use and taught some of Spanish speaking Latin American immigrants how to use the computers. He was happy doing this charitable work and the beneficiaries of his efforts loved him for it. Junior was a man of many talents who was full of life and love for others. I truly wish that every member of our family could have met Uncle Junior. Those of us who did, and knew him well, are the lucky ones.



Uncle Junior showing me (Jeff Ballas) some of the intricacies of the computer.

Everything Was Not All "Roses"

Back in the 1960's when most of us were still in Savanna and Wisconsin, we all hated the rough, frigid winters. One thing we all looked forward to which gave us a little break from the weather, albeit only a mental one, came on New Year's Day. That was when the "Rose Bowl" football game and the "Rose Bowl" parade were on television. Held in beautiful Pasadena, California, the pageantry and beauty of those events always made us envious of anyone living in California. The television coverage of the parade and game included gorgeous panoramic shots of the snow-capped San Gabriel Mountains, downtown Los Angeles, and the miles and miles of warm sandy beaches. It was said that people literally packed up their belongings and moved from the Midwest just because of what they saw on television on that day. (Migration to California from a period during the 1970's averaged 202 persons per day to Orange County and 500 per day to the Los Angeles basin.) When we contemplated our own moves to California, the scenes of January 1st were always in the forefront of our minds.

It seemed everything "came up smelling like roses" in California as we all settled in it to make it our home. The Ballas Families were growing and prospering from the 1970's on into the new millennium. How-

ever, no matter how idyllic things seemed to be in California, we found out that we were not immune to the tragedies and troubles that come with life. In particular, three unexpected events really shook our family.

Uncle Tom Dies in a Helicopter Crash

In 1982, when I was at the end of my one-year stint as a voluntary missionary in Bolivia, the Catholic parish house where I was staying received a message for me. It simply said, "Tom Ballas was killed in a helicopter crash." I was stunned when I heard the news! Was it young Tommy, Uncle Tom's son? I thought so, at first, because Tommy flew helicopters in the Vietnam War. Besides, to my knowledge Uncle Tom only flew his own small planes, never helicopters. Using a short wave radio connected to a ham operator in the States that connected to a telephone, I spoke with my brother Big Jim and found out that it was Uncle Tom who died.

In October 1982, Uncle Tom took his first solo flight in his brand new helicopter. This first solo flight was his last. He had only recently began taking helicopter lessons and bought his own aircraft so he could fly to his various real estate projects in Southern California. On a clear day he took off and either because of a mechanical failure, or pilot error, the rotor blade came unattached and cut through the cockpit of the helicopter. Uncle Tom was trapped in his seat, but had just enough time to find an open space in which to put the helicopter down. As he was maneuvering to land, the machine burst into flames and crashed on the fairway of the Riverview Golf Course in Santa Ana. He never had a chance to save himself, but averted injury to anyone else by putting the fiery helicopter down on an open space on the golf course.

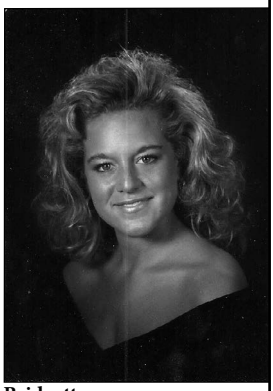


Uncle Tom, the Empire Builder. Photo taken shortly before his death.

Tom Ballas, the man who built an empire and seemed invincible to us all, was gone. The funeral was surreal; it was hard to believe that he was vibrant and alive one day and dead the next. We never thought anything could happen to him. I remember distinctly when family and friends alike would tease him with the old adage saying, "You can't take it with you!", Tom's response was, "Hell, I'm not going anywhere." - Well, Uncle Tom did go somewhere, a long time before he should have. Uncle Tom, the successful grandson of Demetrius Ballas' was only 68 years old when the fatal crash occurred.

Bridgette

When my brother John and his family moved to California it afforded an opportunity for their three girls to not only dream about, but achieve any career path or goal that they wished. Their oldest daughter, Bridgette, achieved her dream by doing it her own way. After college, she went to Europe for several months and visited a dozen countries, including a visit to our family in Kiato, Greece. Bridgette called it her "questa". She made a ton of friends, met her Greek family and got to appreciate her Greek heritage.



Bridgette

Bridgette was a stunningly beautiful girl with a sense of fashion and a charismatic personality. This made her a perfect fit for a career in retail management which she ultimately chose to pursue. She started out at an entry-level sales position with a cosmetic company and impressed people wherever she went. Her bosses raved about her work ethic and skill in creating high producing retail spaces. Before long, she worked her way into becoming a successful Accounts Executive for Calvin Klein Cosmetics. She managed several stores throughout the Los Angeles area, traveled to conventions and company meetings, and was on "top of the world."

Much like all of the Ballas Family whether Greek, American or Australian, we were always getting together; eating, drinking and socializing. But our family gatherings weren't real parties unless Bridgette was involved. When she put a party together, or simply showed up to one, she brought a contagious energy. Everyone had a good time when Bridgette was around. She entered a room like Dinah Shore and swept us along with her. She was full of life and sported her "uniquely Ballas" persona. *(Dinah Shore was a television personality and actress in the 1960's. She was famous for her swooshing-type entry as the host of a variety show.)*



Bridgette on her trip to Greece. Taken at Bill's house in Kiato. Pictured from left to right: John, Bill's daughter, Bill, Violetta, Bridgette, Paulette, and Lisa.

Bridgette always loved the California sunshine and the beaches. Once she could afford to be on her own, she left home to live in Orange County's most beautiful and popular beach communities. One fateful day while she was living in Huntington Beach, Bridgette was brutally attacked

and killed. I have always promised I would not "sensationalize" her death by delving into the details when discussing how she died. I would rather "sensationalize" her life. Suffice to say, Bridgette suffered a cruel and brutal death. The young man who was responsible was eventually caught, found guilty, and sentenced to his own death according to California law.

Bridgette's death brought unbearable sadness to us all. John and Paulette were devastated, as were Lisa and Beth Anne, two sisters who suddenly lost their older sister and best friend. There were no words, no wishes, and seemingly no prayers which could relieve their sorrow. I looked at John, how sad he was, and wished I could take some of the burden of his pain and sorrow off his shoulders, but of course, I couldn't.

Bridgette's funeral was attended by all the family and by literally hundreds of her friends. Everyone displayed the same shock and disbelief. Why did this terrible thing happen? This was the unanswered question everyone struggled with and shared. At the Catholic funeral mass, family members read from scripture and Paulette's brother-in-law gave a eulogy. He spoke some very kind words and reminisced about Bridgette's zest for life, her charisma, and her love for family. The young priest who officiated did a fine job and tried his best to deliver a comforting sermon. At the time, his words may have been profound, but they didn't seem to comfort at all or make any immediate impact. Understandably, our grief was overwhelming and for the most part, it blocked out his message.

For me, after the sharp pain of her loss had dulled a bit, I reflected on the message the priest was trying to convey. It came in two parts. The first part spoke to the suffering God's only son endured when he was sent here on earth to atone for our sins. Christ's death was a human suffering. It was violent and brutal, and like Bridgette's death, it came too early in life and made no sense. Therefore, those of God's children who suffer a violent death are somehow, and in some way, closer to God because they died like Christ. The suffering they endured during their last moments on earth, Christ-like in nature, paved the way for them to enter the kingdom of God without delay.

The second part of his message was one which might be easier for us to understand. The message started with the fact that we are only on this earth for a relatively short time. When we die as Believers in God, we are actually going home; we are going home to our Father in heaven to be with Him for eternity. When Bridgette died, she went home and will be there to guide each and every one of us as we pass on to eternal life. In her transformation from a human life to a spiritual life she became an angel. Now, Bridgette is an angel of God in the form of a ray of light to guide us all when we go to our eternal "home."

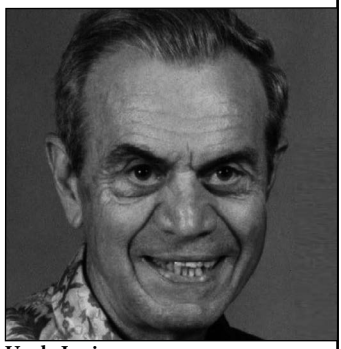
Those of us that knew her here on earth will rejoice in seeing her again. We will get to, once again, see her smiling face, her charismatic personality, and the beauty she possessed as a human being. What a joy that will be! For those members of our family who did not have the pleasure of meeting Bridgette when she was here on earth, they will be

overjoyed when they meet her for the first time. They will get to know her and to discover what made her "uniquely Ballas." So, whenever any one of us Ballas' from America, Greece, or Australia, pass to eternal life, we should look for the angel Bridgette to guide us home.

Uncle Junior Loses Battle with Cancer

Uncle Junior said to me: "Jeffery, my back has been really bothering me lately, maybe I should get one of those wrap-around braces that the warehouse and receiving clerks wear when they do heavy lifting." My uncle and I were moving some of the old donated computers at the St. Vincent DePaul Society offices and warehouse when he made this remark. It was my first time there, I was able to help a little and to observe his routine. Uncle Junior always had a routine, and he was always anxious to tell everyone (in detail) how he did things. He would go to this charity center about once a week and sort through the donated hard drives, monitors and printers. Picking the ones that would do the average person the most good, he would load them in the up the back of his pick-up and take them back to his garage at home. He would then work tirelessly assembling workable computers and installing useful and basic programs.

A few weeks after the sore back comment, Uncle Junior was diagnosed with a cancerous mass in his lower back area. Surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation only delayed the inevitable. Our beloved Uncle Junior succumbed to the one illness that seems to invade our family.



Uncle Junior

There is a bit of background to Uncle Junior's cancer. About 4 years prior to the time he noticed the back pain, Colleen saw a spot on his ear that looked suspicious. He had it checked out by a doctor and was found to have a slight case of skin cancer. A small piece of his ear lobe was cut off, which was hardly noticeable. Although Colleen may have been concerned, the rest of the family seemed to take it in stride. Uncle Junior down played it and eagerly (and almost jokingly) showed everyone how a case of melanoma caused him to lose part of his ear.

It turned out the mass in his lower back was made up of the same melanoma cancer cells as those that were removed from his ear. How strange and cruel this incurable form of cancer can be. In Uncle Junior's case, the melanoma cells ran and hid from his ear to his lower back. After the operation and treatments, Colleen fixed up a hospital bed which Uncle Junior convalesced in for eight months. Visitors came daily; he met friends and family with his usual upbeat, fun-loving personality. He never wanted people to feel sorry for him and he did not want sadness around him. He was more interested in seeing how his family and friends were

doing than to tell them how he was doing. Uncle Junior died a courageous death; he was only 71 years old when he left us.

No, not everything came up "roses" in California. Some bad things happened to the family. It was hard to understand why our loved ones died way too early in life, but we tried accept all the pain and sorrow and looked to our faith in God for help. Through the difficulties we learned even more to appreciate the many good things in life. We found comfort in the closeness of our family and as of today, we continue to enjoy our bond as members of the Ballas Family to the fullest.

Chapter 6

The Ballas' in Greece Make Their Own Move for a Better Life

When the family in America began to establish roots in California, the latest generation of Ballas' in Greece had already begun its own search for a better life. After the war and into the 1950's, the land in Kiato, which was purchased by Demetrius thirty years earlier, was the sole source of income for the family. The most profitable crop which this land could produce was tomatoes. The bounty from the tomato harvest was sold to wholesalers and trucked into Athens. The older sons and daughters of Christos and Theodoros worked long, hard hours farming the land. There were no other options which our family could pursue for income. The poor economy of Greece did not provide for other opportunities. The future for any of the young members of the Ballas Family looked bleak. However, one family member initiated a bold step which would ultimately determine the future of much of the family in Greece.

Louie (Elias)

Louie Ballas, the oldest son of Theodoros, only went through the first four grades of the local school. After that, he had to work every day tending the land, so the family could eat. During his years as a young boy working day and night, Louie formulated his own dream for a better life; he wanted to go to America and live with his uncles and cousins. Theodoros did not want his oldest son to leave, but Louie had a mind of his own. Louie's recount of the circumstances surrounding his move from Greece demonstrates, once again, some of the Ballas family members can be very adventurous and enterprising.

"I was determined to leave Kiato," said Louie when I interviewed him in September 2012. " *I realized that a better life was to be had in America. I had this idea in my head because I remembered the trunk full of things we received after the war, and from letters and stories that came from America. When I was 17 years old, I took it upon myself to write to the President of the United States. A man in our village helped me draft a letter that I addressed to:*

Mr. Eisenhower
President of America
The White House
Washington, D.C.

(Louie has a particular fondness for Dwight D. Eisenhower, the 34th president of the United States, because as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, Eisenhower drove Hitler's troops from Europe which ultimately led to the downfall of the German occupation of Greece).

Louie goes on to say: *The letter took me almost a week to write and I asked the President to let me come to America to work and be with*

my uncles and cousins. I told him that I was a hardworking young man and that I knew a lot about farming and that my uncles had farms in Wisconsin.

I don't even think that my dad knew I wrote the letter. He probably would have thought that it was a foolish idea anyway. But, while I was waiting for a reply from the President, I would always ask questions from people in Kiato that knew about getting to America. It seemed like some boys my age were going there. I got to know the man that delivered mail to our house and we talked about many things. One day he told me that some Greek men and boys were now going to Australia instead of America. He said it was a new country and they wanted workers there and that they would even pay for the cost of the ticket to get you there. I was pretty excited and thought it would be good to find out more about it. About the same time, we received a letter from my Uncle John, the oldest of my uncles in America. He said it was difficult for anyone to migrate to America because there was a quota system and that jobs were hard to find. After hearing this, I started to make up my mind to go to Australia. My dad was very upset to find out I was serious about leaving. He said I needed to help him with all my younger brothers and sisters. Without my father's knowledge, I kept talking to the postman and found out the Australian embassy in Athens was taking sign-ups for men to go to Australia. It was around harvest time for the tomatoes when I made up a plan on how to get to Athens to go to the embassy. We would load up the trucks in the late afternoon that took the tomatoes to Athens. These trucks would leave early in the morning after getting loaded the day before and deliver the load to the market. They would then come back later that day to load up for the next day's trip. This is how I made it to Athens and back. Early in the morning while it was still dark and just before one of the trucks left for the trip into the city, I jumped in the back and hid between the crates of tomatoes. I had to be very quiet, especially when the driver and his man would stop along the way and check the load. I had to crawl way back in the truck so they wouldn't see me. I think the distance to Athens was only 80 kilometers, but the truck was slow and lumbered under a heavy load of about 7 tons of tomatoes. The roads were bumpy and dusty and it took over six hours to get there. I was really hungry because I had no breakfast before we left so I ate tomatoes all the way to Athens.

As we approached the market in Athens, I was ready to jump out of the truck while it was still moving. I got out of the truck without being noticed and started asking people where the Australian Embassy was. Many told me to take a bus to the address which was: 16 Konstandinis Street, but I didn't even have the few cents needed for the fare. It was a long way and I walked as fast as I could. I had to ask many times along the way so I didn't get lost. I finally found the building and saw many young men my age waiting in a long line. Not knowing what to do, I got in line myself. When it was finally my turn, I filled out some paperwork giving my family information and where I was from. Later I was checked out by a doctor.

Then all of a sudden I was given a passport and an immigration visa for Australia. They told me to come back in 5 days to get on an Italian ship at the port city of Piraeus. I was stunned! Rather than just getting answers to how I could go to Australia, I was already signed up and was scheduled to leave the next Saturday.

I ran most of the way back to the market just in time to jump into the back of the truck that was heading to Kiato. This time the truck was full of empty boxes that were going to be refilled. I knew I had to run because when we left in the morning I heard the driver and his man talking about what time they would return. I first told my Mom what had happened when I got home. She was okay with it, but when my dad found out he was really mad. After a few days he could see that I was dead-set on going and he gave me his blessing. On the Saturday the ship was to leave, my mom, dad and my sister Maria and I all took the bus to Piraeus where the ship was docked. We all cried and said our goodbyes. I was bound for a new country and was going to realize my own dream for a better life."

Louie took that ship, and after sailing the Mediterranean Sea, passing through the Suez Canal, and crossing the open seas of the vast Indian Ocean, he arrived 42 days later in Fremantle, Western Australia. His journey continued with train and bus rides to Melbourne and then on to Sydney. Louie Ballas, a young man who was not afraid to ask questions and seek advice all on his own, became the first of our family to immigrate to Australia and start a new life.

When Louie arrived in Sydney, the Australian government had set up meager accommodations for him and other immigrants. He was given a place to sleep and started to work at a few menial jobs. He didn't earn much money the first month and a half while in Sydney and it was lucky for him that he had a ten pound note his Dad borrowed from a friend in Kiato. That little bit of money, along with the two sets of clothes, one pair of shoes, and the blanket his mother packed for the trip, helped him survive. *(The blanket in particular was very useful. It kept him from freezing on the open deck of the ship. Louie still has that same blanket as a keepsake of his trip back in 1954. Those of us who know Louie understand this for he is the type of man that saves everything, keeps old stuff working, and never wastes a thing.)*

Eventually he and his fellow immigrants were sent to better paying jobs promised by the government. In Louie's case, and because of his experience in farming, he was sent to the territory of Victoria to farm grapes with three other men. There was a Greek speaking interpreter on the farm who explained to the boys how to work the fields. The four of them stayed in a bunk house and went to work early in the mornings. Each one was paid 2 cents for each box of grapes they picked. Louie was by far the fastest and best worker on the farm. In three short weeks he had more money than he had ever seen in his life. As soon as he had a chance to go to the nearest town, he sent half of his earnings home to Kiato. Two months later he received a letter from his father, Theodoros,

saying, "Got the money, thanks son, you saved us."

It took three months to pick the entire harvest of grapes. This is typical in the grape business and it is very critical the grapes be picked at a certain time. The owner of the farm was very complimentary of Louie because the picking season (called the "vendange" in French) was completed on time and the harvest was a big success, in part, due to Louie's hard work. Although he was invited back for the next year, Louie had other plans to find a more permanent job.

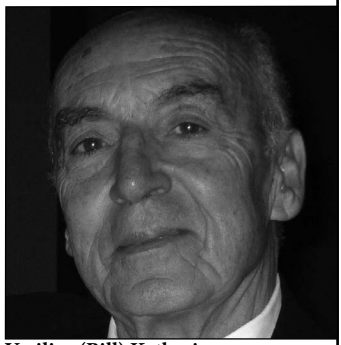
Sydney seemed to be the best place for Louie to look for steady employment. When he first returned to Sydney from the grape harvesting job, nothing seemed to present itself. The Australian government eventually sent him to a steel mill outside of Sydney where he worked a hard, backbreaking job as a laborer. Nearly three years later, he had money saved up to move back to Sydney and buy a small house. The idea was to have a place so his brothers and sisters could join him in Australia.



Helen (Ballas) Katharios

Louie found a job and settled into the new house that he purchased in Sydney's inner west suburban town of Rozelle. It was an area not too far from the Harbor Bridge where the famous Sydney Opera House is located. The house was small, only one room, but it was his for the £600 British Sterling. He proudly paid for it in cash and was now ready for his brothers and sisters to join him in Australia.

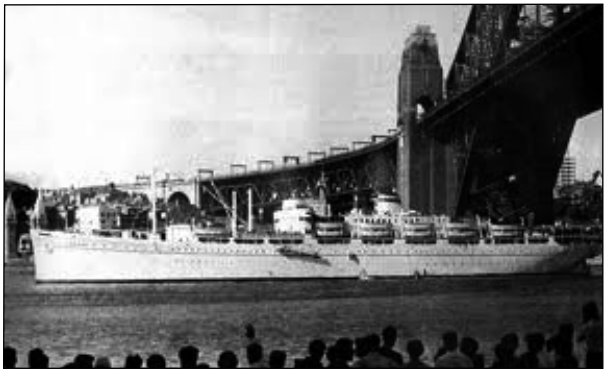
The first of his siblings to come to join him was Helen. She migrated to Australia in 1956 and lived with Louie in Rozelle. Helen found work in a factory that made frames for eyeglasses (spectacles) and worked her way up to a lower management level. She married in 1958, and moved with her new husband Bill Katharios, to Blackheath (a small country town in the Blue Mountains). Bill and Helen started a potato processing factory where they cut chips (known as french fries to the Americans). They grew their own potatoes on a farm they owned in central New South Wales, and then eventually bought a building in Yagoona, Sydney. The factory peeled the potatoes, washed them, chopped them into 'chips' and bagged them. The chips were then readied to be distributed to "take-away" shops and restaurants all over Sydney. Helen and Bill called their company: 'Bill's Chips'. As the company started to grow, Bill developed an innovative process which preserved the



Vasilios (Bill) Katharios

color and texture of a potato after it was peeled and cut. Bill's Chips really caught on because it was the only company of its kind that provided a product fryer-ready on delivery and could hold a fresh-cut appearance for several days.

Maria came to Australia next. At that time, single women did not have to pay for their passage tickets to Australia because the Australian government was trying to encourage working men to start families and build up the population. Maria remembers her journey took 37 days – she left Kiato the end of February and arrived in Sydney on March 17, 1958. She came to Australia via an Italian vessel named ' MS Flaminia' (Cogedar Lines).



The M.S. Flaminia passing through Sydney Harbor. Circa; 1950's

Maria found a job quickly in the eyeglass factory where Helen worked. She was a hard worker and quick learner. She was trusted to be the first person to try out new equipment and then trained others how to use it. Maria soon met Chris Stavropoulos and they married. They too, were in the restaurant business and ran a number of take-away shops (hamburgers, fish and chips, sandwiches).

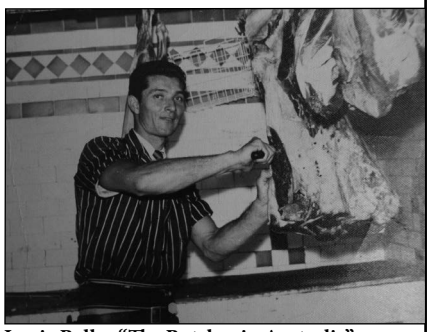
After moving to Australia and getting married, raising three children, and running the family business with Chris, Maria now admits to only two regrets in her life; 1) She never took advantage of the night English classes which were offered when she first arrived in the country, and 2) She gave up driving soon after she got her first license. Other than that, Maria found a better life for herself in further fulfillment of her grandfather's dream.

Louie's migration to Australia also turned his own dream for a better life into a reality. He helped his younger siblings find a better life and took on a surrogate father role for six of them. After Helen and Maria arrived in Australia, Sam, Eva and finally Jim and Harry, arrived as well. All of the Ballas' were hard workers and found jobs whether they were experienced in a particular field or not. They lived with Louie until they either got married or until they could afford to be out on their own.

Louie married a Greek girl named Katrina in 1961, after two of

his younger sisters had already married. Before his marriage, he found his niche in life as a butcher. He took the risk of learning a trade completely foreign to him by starting at the "bottom of the ladder" as a third grade butcher in a supermarket. Louie was not to be held down; he worked his way up to be manager of the meat department, attained first grade butcher status, and then bought his own shop.

In 1961, Jim and Harry, at the age of 15 and 13, respectively, migrated to Australia aboard a ship called, "The Patris." ("The Patris" was a Greek-owned ship that carried immigrants from Greece to Australia. It made 91 voyages between the two countries.) Jim and Harry worked for a short time for Louie in his shop. According to Louie, Jim had some experience in electrical work and learned English rather quickly. Jim was a self-taught electrician and very good at working things out. In the late 1960's he moved to Adelaide, South Australia, with a company he was working for and met his wife. They moved back to Sydney after they married in 1969 and started a family. He continued working as an electrician for many years in a Munitions Filling Factory as the lead electrician. To this day, he is a very talented 'tinkerer' and can fix anything electrical or motor-related, and he can even completely re-wire homes and other large buildings.



Louie Ballas "The Butcher in Australia".

Harry, on the other hand, didn't like work too much. According to Louie, he liked girls better (this is exactly what Louie told me about his brother; he seemed to say it more in fun than anything else). Harry dabbled in a bit of everything but mainly had his own small business where he would sell and deliver various spices to take-away shops and restaurants.

Eva migrated to Australia in the early 1960's as well. She married and had three sons. On my last trip to Kiato in September 2012, I met up with cousin Gus (from Santa Barbara), J.D. (Uncle Junior's son) and his wife, Angela who were also visiting the family in Greece. On that trip, we were lucky enough to see Eva whose was visiting from Australia. She was back to her homeland to see her brothers, Sam and Louie (who had moved back to Greece to retire in the 1980's, more on that story later in this chapter). It was a real surprise to see her. We had dinner one night at the restaurant at the old train station where young Theo (Sam's son) was working. We took pictures and learned about her early days in Australia and about her family.

Eva reminded me how we had met in Australia years ago when I was visiting all the family "Down Under". She recounted I made a speech at her son, Alex's, wedding. *(The "speech" was really just a toast. After a*


Eva sharing a laugh with her cousin Gus.

few glasses of champagne I assumed the role of family ambassador from the United States and extended best wishes to Alex and his new bride from all the Ballas' in America.)

Eva shared with us how the Ballas children of Theodoros and Anna, found Australia to their liking. She explained that she and her brothers and sisters enjoyed their new country, took advantage of the opportunities that were presented to them, and started families of their own.

The only one of the eight children of Theodoros who did not migrate to Australia was the youngest son, Con, who remained in Greece to be the patriarchal manager of the family home and land. Con stayed in Kiato and lived in a house on a part of the Ballas property where the original, one-room house was located - the house where Demetrius and Eleni raised their eight boys. Con lived together with his mother, father and new wife when he got married. After his father died, Con took loving care of his mother, Anna, who lived on widowed for nearly 19 years. In her later years she became very ill. Auntie Anna, the hard-working woman I first met while she was plowing the family fields, lived her last few years needing around- the-clock care. She passed away in 1999, with her caregivers, Con and Maria, at her side.

Each Had A Unique Story

Moving to a new country at a young age presents challenges and opportunities for any immigrant. The Ballas Family immigrating to Australia was no different. Theodoros and Anna's seven children were eventually were joined by six of Christos and Forta's children. In all, 13 of Old Demetrius' grandchildren moved to Australia in search of a better life for themselves. Each has his or her own story to tell. I am writing this section of the book having just arrived back from Washington D.C. where I had the privilege of attending my nephew's wedding. His name is Jim Ballas and he is the son of my brother, Big Jim. At last count he is the fifteenth descendent of Old Demetrius named Jim Ballas.

I had a personal experience on that trip which gave me pause for thought. Our nation's capital is a very beautiful and cosmopolitan city. It is filled with people from virtually every country on the globe. Many are immigrants looking to start a new life. The employees at the hotel where we stayed, most of the wait staff at the coffee shops, restaurants, and bars were foreigners who were just learning English. Many times, I was frustrated not being able to understand them and, at times I couldn't even understand the answer when I inquired about the cost of

a simple cup of coffee. These people from the Congo, Ethiopia, Russia, Poland, Czech Republic, other former Soviet Bloc countries, various Arab nations, Mexico, and even Greece, were doing the best they could to survive. How difficult it must be for them to learn the language and culture of a new country! In addition to language barriers, they are often subject to ridicule and prejudice for being "foreigners" and for taking American jobs. I pondered this when I recounted the story of Louie, the first to migrate to Australia. He had no formal education, having only attending school up to the fourth grade before going out on his own to a foreign country. Those of us who have studied another language can only image how Louie must have struggled when he arrived in Australia after 42 days at sea. It must have been a monumental task for a young, uneducated Greek boy to learn English. Louie never mentioned it to me, nor did he ever complain about the difficulties with learning a new language or with being ridiculed or mistreated. He simply persevered and succeeded. His brothers, sisters, and cousins who followed, had the same problems and were faced with their own challenges. These members of our family courageously navigated through language, culture and prejudicial barriers as they made a new life in a strange land nearly 10,000 miles from their home.

Our family members were part of Australia's very ambitious migration program. After World War II, young men, women and families had their passage to Australia paid for by the Government. The immigrants were promised a better life living in the "Land of Tomorrow". I have chronicled a few more individual stories of our family which migrated to Australia under this plan. As you read on, keep in mind the challenges presented as they courageously searched for a better life.

Sam (Sotiris)

Sam came to Australia around 1958 when he was eighteen years old. His first job was planting trees in the Blue Mountains, a region in New South Wales about 200 kilometers from Sydney. He worked on a tree farm located just outside the City of Oberon, which is now a very popular tourist destination. It was here he met up with his father who was already there working. It seems his father, Theodoros, had gone to Australia so he could sponsor his young sons, Jim and Harry, who were not old enough to be sponsored by anyone but a parent (the other siblings were sponsored by Louie).

Theodoros got a job on the forest crew while he was waiting out the time limit to become a qualified sponsor. He worked as a helping hand and was quite popular with the workers because he used to make them tea and coffee. He spoke very little English and stayed in Australia just long enough to be eligible to sponsor the boys. Theodoros returned to Greece to rejoin his wife, Anna, and never visited Australia again.

Meanwhile, Sam remained and worked for about a year and a

half planting trees in the winter and doing trimming work in the summer. This was good work for Sam because he knew farming and he understood how to work the land. Sam was industrious and was always looking for better opportunities. After a season of planting and trimming, he moved on to do mill work. The pay for this type of work was based on the amount of output each worker produced. Sam was a hard worker and made more than anyone else doing the same job. He was paid £9 British Sterling for each pallet of wood he processed through the mill. The three pallets per day Sam put out paid him £27 British Sterling (over $50.00 U.S. dollars), which was a lot of money in those days. However, because most of his brothers and sisters were living in Sydney, Sam wanted to be nearer to them and have an opportunity to make even more money. He moved to the city and started to work for Bill, his sister's husband. Sam first worked as a cook under Bill's tutelage in a fish and chips shop. He then got involved in Bill's potato chip factory and distribution business which served about fifteen locations throughout the Sydney area.

The operations for the distribution company and the factory that produced the potato chips were located in a western suburb of Sydney called Blacktown (named after the early Aboriginal settlement located there). Sam lived there and made good money, but eventually felt the need to venture out on his own. Having recently married to a wonderful Greek girl named Eva (Evanthia), Sam wanted to build something of his own for his family. In 1966, he bought himself a truck to haul potatoes and started his own distribution business. In a few years, Sam's new business quickly reached its peak, delivering to approximately 75 different fish and chip shops throughout the Sydney area. Most of his customers took delivery of three to four 60 kilo bags of potatoes, three times per week. This amounted to about 1,000 bags of fresh potatoes sold per week. Not a bad business for a young Greek man who was starting a new life in a strange country.

Sam and Eva had two children, Anna and Theo. Sam's perseverance in working various jobs and taking a risk to go out on his own made a better life for him and his family.

Uncle Christos' Sons; Bill (Vlasis) and Con (Kostas), and the Four Who Followed

Bill and Con were the first of Uncle Christos' sons to make their way to Australia. In 1954, they had thoughts of going to America, but the U.S. was involved in the Korean War. The two figured if they became U.S. citizens they might have to fight in a war and this didn't seem like a good idea. The war, coupled with the fact that they also read the letter from their Uncle John saying jobs were hard to find in America, helped make up their minds to try Australia. They traveled much the same route as their cousin Louie, who had left a few months earlier. They went under

the guise of being experienced in farming, thereby, they were given free passage by the Australian government. Once they arrived, they didn't do farm work at all. Instead, they obtained higher paying jobs in the steel factory located about 100 kilometers outside of Sydney. Within six months of factory work they had enough money saved to send for their sister, Helen (Eleni, named after her grandmother). The two brothers moved to Sydney because they needed accommodations for Helen. They found a place to live which had sufficient room for the three of them. Bill started a job in a restaurant and did everything from washing dishes to making coffee and blended fruit drinks. He was willing to do almost any job, in order to learn all the basics needed to start his own business.

Con, on the other hand, approached his search for work in a very atypical Ballas fashion. Instead of working in a small business with the independent idea of starting his own, Con looked for a career with a large company. The first job he found in Sydney turned out to be the only one he needed. Con went to work for the food service division of Qantas Airlines and remained there for his entire career.

Bill learned all he needed to in about nine months working for someone else and then started his own "milk bar" shop. A milk bar is a type of small shop that sells sandwiches, candy, coffee, as well as fruit and ice cream treats. It is more of a take-away business servicing working people for mornings and lunches. Bill's first milk bar was located across from a theatre. This location provided a steady stream of customers before and after performances, as well as a good morning and lunch trade. Bill rented apartments across the street from his milk bar where he, Con and Helen lived. Their brother, Denis (Dionisis), arrived from Greece sometime later, so Bill bought a house on Cicely Street which provided room for all of them. Helen found work in a garment factory as a sewing expert. This was the same type of job she had learned while working back in Athens before she migrated from Greece.

When Denis came to live with me in California in the late 1970's, he told me a little about his life in Australia. As Denis tells it, he was a young boy, who couldn't understand English at all, but somehow found a job at one of the popular Sydney beaches. It seems it was customary in Australia to have attendants for hire who would spray or spread suntan oil on the beach goers. Yes, our cousin Denis, just after getting off the boat, got a job most boys could only dream about. At 17 years old, Denis was actually paid to rub the bodies of beautiful Australian girls so they would get an even tan. I guess being an immigrant in a strange country wasn't always filled with hard times and personal sacrifices. Hooray for Denis-- a cousin we can always look up to!



Denis

The last two of Bill's siblings to arrive in Australia were Leo

(Elias) and Suzie (Soula). Leo found work in a factory, while Suzie worked with Bill until she married. At a young age (around 20 years old), Suzie married Alf Giesta, a man of Portuguese decent (she was one of the few in her generation in Australia to marry a non-Greek). They had two daughters, Nancy and Christine, who were born in the early 1960's.

Bill, himself, did not marry until he was 39 years old. He was dedicated to helping his younger brothers and sisters to get established in Australia. He also seemed to always be on the move. In the 17 years of living in Australia before he was married, Bill had seven different shops (milk bars) in seven different locations. One of his most successful shops was located in Kings Cross, a highly popular section of Sydney, similar to Times Square in New York. He sold the shop in Kings Cross in 1959 for £33,000 British Sterling. Bill tells me today it would be worth millions.

In my most recent trip to Greece in September 2012, I had a chance to chat with Bill and learn more details of what life was like in Australia, as well as and how he got involved in owning his milk bar businesses. I sat for over an hour with Bill at the old train station in Kiato and here is what he had to say:

"I didn't much like working for someone else so I learned early on how to set up my own business. The milk bar business seemed easy enough to run, location was most important. If you had a steady flow of customers that stopped in everyday, you could make a pretty good living. After my first shop across from the theatre, I moved to the Seven Hills suburb about 20 miles from Sydney center. I found a place at the commuter railway station that had gone out of business. I convinced the House of Commissions to let me re-open it. The building was old and I submitted plans to the Commission to re-build on the site with room for 20 small shops that I planned to rent out. I hired an attorney to help me with my proposal to the Commission. After about 11 months, there still was no decision on my proposal. Then out of nowhere, the Commission said they were going to build a bridge that required using the property and forced me out under a claim of eminent domain. The government paid me a little more than the property cost me originally so it wasn't too bad. I lost out on a chance to make it big, but I took that money and went back to Sydney where I bought the King's Cross shop. This turned out to be a real good decision.

King's Cross was a very busy area and had a lot of foot traffic. Bars, restaurants, shops, and even prostitute houses filled this area. I opened my shop and soon found that there was enough business to keep it open for 24 hours a day, seven days a week. My brother Leo helped me for a while, and at the same time I was helping him to learn the fish and chips business. He met an English girl named Rhonda. They got married and ran a very successful fish and chips shop of their own. Louie did real well in the business, mostly take-away. They had three wonderful daughters, Fiona, Kayla, and Chrisia. (On my one and only visit to Australia, I met Louie and Rhonda and the girls. I can attest to the fact their business was

a big success. Every day during the lunch hour they had an incredibly long line of take-away customers. The fish and chips they served were the best I had ever tasted).

My brother Denis also worked for me at King's Cross. But Denis, like many in our family, was always on the move. He was introduced to his wife, Christina, by our sister, Helen. Christina worked down the street from the shop. After Denis got married, they got the travel bug and went to America. With Denis gone, Louie in his own business and all my brothers and sisters being married, I was alone to run the business. When my lease was up for renewal, I decided to let it go and sold the goodwill of the business for a nice profit. I was still single myself and went back to Greece. I had recently received a letter from my father, Christos, asking me to come home. He said that my younger sister, Nota, who was still living at home, had met a man she wanted to marry. My father felt it was my responsibility to meet this guy and check him out. I went back to Kiato, sold some property of the family that was in Nota's name, and moved her to Athens. This would make her a good catch for a husband. Then I set things up so I could check out my sister's suitor. We arranged a meeting in Athens at Nota's new place. The guy didn't even show up! This was a clear indication he really didn't love her. Nota was disappointed to say the least; but she made a go of it in Athens. About one year later, she met and married a good man, named Demo Baxiavanis. Demo was a really big man and worked for a beer distributing company. His delivery route took him near Kiato, so from time to time, he was able to take Nota home to see her father and mother. This worked out really good for everyone. Demo and Nota had two children; Kathy and Jimmy.

Meanwhile, I stayed in Greece for about nine months, but there were not many opportunities to make a living. I went back to Australia and looked for a location to start another business. When I arrived, I noticed a change in the business climate. It had been customary in the past that when buying an existing business, you had to pay for the "goodwill" of the business in addition to the inventory and furnishings. This time, as I was looking for a business to buy, goodwill was not an issue. It seemed the old Greeks and other immigrants who usually owned the shops wanted to retire. Their children all were getting educated and wanting professional careers which left the parents without options. I was able to buy a business by only paying for the inventory. I got into a couple businesses that way and made some good money.

I met a girl when I was back in Greece and went to the embassy to get the paperwork started so she could join me in Australia. Her family did not want her to leave Greece because she was an only child. I promised that if we got married, I would someday bring her back home. Violetta and I married in Greece in 1972, and then moved to Australia. Our two beautiful daughters, Fiona and Kelly, were born there. I had several ventures and several businesses in Australia during the next 15 years."

Bill was a very popular man in town and consequently, during our talk we were frequently interrupted. The locals would come by and say hello and chat for a while. Bill seemed to know everyone. They spoke Greek with him so all I could do was sit there and watch their expressions. It gave me a chance to reflect on some of the things Bill told me. His story seemed reminiscent of a few of our family members back in the United States. Bill went back and forth from Greece to Australia many times, he bought and sold many different businesses; some did well, some not so well. My great Uncle Louie and Bill were lot alike. Louie moved from the Antigo farm to Savanna many times. He was involved in farming, bars and restaurants, home building, woodworking and masonry. Louie was always trying to find his niche in life. I guess there might be some gypsy blood in our family. My brother, Big Jim, must have had some of it, too. He moved from Wisconsin to California at least five or six times with his family. Jim was always looking for different opportunities and was unsettled at times. Things were the same with our cousin Denis. He and Christina went from Greece to Australia many times, they left Australia for the United States, and worked in Florida (where Denis became a top-notch seafood chef), then came to California so they could do the paperwork to move back to Australia. In the meantime, Denis bought property near Kiato with the idea he would live there someday. That was Denis; always on the move like many of our family members.

Once we got back to the interview, Bill seemed very calm as he recounted his business ventures. The risks he took would have made the average person very nervous. He did not have a formal education in business (he only made it to the second grade in school), but learned as he went along and he wasn't intimidated. He made deals with banks for business loans and worked with government entities and attorneys for permits and licenses; all in a country where the language and customs were foreign to him.

Bill continued on, remembering things in non-sequential order. He told me about one of his business ventures in particular:

"Before I got married, I had a restaurant business that ended before I really wanted it to. It was out in Inverell, over 350 miles from Sydney. I chose this location because there was a damn project on the Macintyre River which had over 2,500 workers. I set up the only restaurant in the area and business was booming. I had to hire five waiters and more kitchen help than I ever had before. My brother, Louie, was with me. He always loved gambling and started a card parlor in a section of the restaurant building. We were going gang-busters for about three months until, during the digging operations, they found diamonds. The Australian government came in and shut down the project so they could take control of the diamonds. Being a natural resource, the diamonds were government property. When the diamond mining got under way, they also found gold and sapphires down by the river. This was all very exciting; but not for me.

The damn workers left and by business went to hell! I sold it to a Dutchman for half of what I had into it."

Bill's remarkable story went on. After he got married he operated a shop in Gilgandra, a small city far outside of Sydney. Violleta gave birth there to Fiona, their first child, so they returned to Greece to baptize her. After a three to four month stay, they returned to Australia. Bill started another shop, this time a fish and chips shop, in a town called Muswellbrook. This town was located at the junction of two railroad lines and was noted for its coal mining operations. Bill, Violetta and Fiona lived in apartments above the shop when their second daughter, Kelly, was born. Eventually, they moved back to Sydney.

Around 1989, Bill was ready to live up to his promise and move back to Greece. At that time he had accumulated three properties which he rented as apartments and shops, and he had over £100,000 British Sterling in the bank. When he tried to sell off his properties, he found out he was subject to a 39% penalty if the money was taken out of the country. He really had no choice, so he cashed out everything, paid the penalty, and moved to Greece. I could see in his face that he was somewhat disappointed he had to pay that much in penalty money, but "that's life" as he would say.

Bill and his family built a beautiful home in Kiato near the old railroad tracks. The home is one of the nicest in the area. The two girls went to England for their formal education where they attended Warren College. Bill is now 77 years old and collects a modest pension from Australia. He is done running businesses, has a nice house and a great wife. The girls are doing well and Bill is enjoying retirement in the slow-paced lifestyle of Kiato. Old Demetrius would really have been proud of his grandson, Bill, who took on challenges and adversity to make a better life for his family.



Bill and family outside their new home in Kiato. Wife, Violetta, and daughters, Fiona and Kelly.

Those Who Stayed in Greece; Jim and Nota

Six brothers and sisters on Christos' side migrated from Greece to Australia, two stayed in Greece; Jim and Nota. Jim (Demetrius) was the oldest son, and therefore received the name of his grandfather Old Demetrius. Jim never went to Australia and found a home for himself and his family in the Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece, located in a northern territory. He worked for the government there and is now retired.

Nota was very close to her mother and father and did not want to leave them. She remained in Kiato until her marriage to Demo Baxivanis. They have two children, Jimmy and Kathy, the only grandchildren that grew up near Christos and Forta. The kids spent many days in Kiato when they were young, and brought tons of joy to their grandparents.

Louie and Sam Move Back to Greece

If you now were to visit our beloved town of Kiato, you would see a very active community -- streets busy with foot traffic, scooters and cars, and restaurants lining the beaches along the shoreline of The Gulf of Corinth. You would also see two, four-story apartment houses located on the old Ballas property. In the shaded patios of those two units, you would probably find Louie Ballas sitting in one, and across the street, you would find his brother, Sam, sitting in the other. If they weren't taking a rest, they would be tinkering with something mechanical, or working on the trees, grape vines, or flowers in their yards.

The brothers, Louie and Sam, spent just over thirty years in Australia. They raised their families there, made a good living, and adjusted to the cultural nuances. However, something in their heart told them Greece was still their home. After visiting many times and seeing their parents getting older, the boys decided to move back to the land of their birth. Louie went back first. He took his piece of the Ballas property on the corner Platanos and Ephiavus streets and laid out plans to build new a home. Rather than construct a single family home, Louie built a four-story apartment unit with one unit for he and his family to live in, and the other units to rent out. The building went up in stages as he accumulated the funds for its construction.

Brother Sam did things much the same way on the family property across the street. His design was for eight separate apartments. Sam had a place for his family; his wife Eva, and their children Anna and Theo. The remaining units were built as rental income property like Brother Louie's.

The boys did not skimp on quality of materials or design. They were built to withstand the frequent earthquakes that hit Kiato and at the same time were of elegant design. Each unit has large windows and balconies providing for full enjoyment of the spectacular views of the hill country on one side and the Gulf of Corinth on the other. *(During my last trip to Kiato in September 2012, cousin J.D. who was also, there commented on the high quality and solid construction of the apartments. J.D. knows his stuff, he is a smart guy, a civil engineer and is a project supervisor in the large city near Los Angeles. In particular, he was really impressed with hand-laid terrazzo floors Louie and Sam had in the units.)*

The brothers were now back in Kiato with a chance to be with their parents and brother, Con. Moving back to Kiato also provided an environment to raise their kids in Greece and immerse them in Greek

language and traditions. The move to Greece was also good for Louie and Sam because, before they left Australia, they qualified for lifetime pensions. Even though they were going to reside in Greece, they still could collect their Australian pensions (known as being "on the dole"). The Australian dollars were very valuable when exchanged into Greek drachma and not only provided the means to build the apartment units, but also allow them to live comfortable lifestyles without financial worry.



Louie's apartment home.

Louie and Sam were able to help their kids as they grew older and started their own families by giving them each a unit of their own in the buildings. As of this writing, Greece is in tremendous financial turmoil. The cost of living has skyrocketed and there are simply no jobs for young men and women. The foresight of Louie and Sam in building the apartment units and passing them down to their kids has made life for everyone in their respective families a much easier path then for most Greeks. They enjoy a better life; just as Old Demetrius would have wanted it!



Sam's apartment home.

Migrating to Australia also provided one, unintended benefit; all the Ballas men left Greece prior to their eighteenth birthday and were able to avoid the compulsory military service facing all young Greek men. The issue of avoiding military service came up in 1976, when Theodoros' son, Jim, returned to Greece for the first time on holiday with his young family. Upon entering the country, he was asked to "pay a fee to avoid having to complete military service". Jim knew that this was just a typical bribery scam and he said to the officer asking him to pay up, "Okay then, I won't pay so I'll do the military service instead." The officer, taken by surprise at this answer and therefore unable to think clearly, answered, "But you are now too old to do military service". Jim responded: 'That's right, I am too old so let me go." Jim and his family walked right through without paying a cent to the corrupt officer. He proved once again the Ballas' are a clever bunch!

Chapter 7

The Amazing Ballas Stories of Uncle Christos

Building a bridge

It must have been sometime in the late 1970's when I made my second visit to Greece. This time, I kind of knew what to expect and was really looking forward to seeing everyone again. I also had the good fortune of meeting my cousin, Denis, and his wife, Christine, who were there on a visit of their own. I hadn't seen them since they left California to move back to Australia several years before. We became very close when he and Christine came to visit their Ballas Family in Northern California. They lived with me for several months while waiting for the paperwork to be processed at the Australian Embassy in San Francisco. Denis, Uncle Christos' third son, spoke English quite well (albeit he spoke it with a significant Greek/Australian accent) because he lived in Florida for many years. Christine also spoke very good English, so having both of them with me in Greece to translate made things a whole lot easier. (No more eating a whole chicken for dinner and watching the chicken population diminish before my eyes!)

As soon as I arrived, I was greeted with a tremendous outpouring of love from Uncle Christos and Auntie Forta. It was as if I was a long-lost son returning home after many years. The expression of love I felt at that moment was a kind of love which transcends beyond the moment. It spoke to me as if to say: "Welcome back Jeffery, you once again symbolize what it would be like to be reunited with our brothers who left us many years ago." I felt I had formed a bridge between America and Greece, between separated families. I also felt blessed and privileged to be able to illicit such emotion. Upon reflection, however, I could see it was not so much of my doing, rather a realization that a bond exists between all of us in the Ballas Family. It is a bond unbroken by distance or time. If any of you reading this story were to meet a family member for the first time, whether in Greece, Australia or America, you would immediately experience this same bond. You would feel connected in a wonderful way, connected because you too, are a member of the Ballas Family and have a part in the "Ballas Story."

The Big 'Bala'

As soon as things settled down and we all recovered from the excitement of all the hugs and kisses, Auntie Forta began to start a fire in the outside clay oven. She used twigs and small limbs cut from the citrus trees in her backyard. She was still using the old oven where she cooked all those precious chickens during my first visit. With great joy, she chopped potatoes, vegetables and garlic which would later be added to the huge piece of lamb in the giant roasting pan. Once the flames burned down and the embers were glowing, Auntie Forta placed the giant pan into the oven with the greatest of care and with a big smile on her face. It was easy to see she was very proud of her dinner and she had prepared it

with love.

A table was set up outside and the meal was served. It was the most delicious roasted lamb dinner imaginable. A few glasses of Retsina wine during the meal made us all feel relaxed and at ease with one another. Even though I was over 5,000 miles from home, I felt extremely comfortable in the presence of my Greek family.

Denis and Christine had a lot of questions for me. They became very close to my brother Jim, his wife Carol, and their children, and wanted to know details on how everyone was doing. Denis and his wife also traveled with us to Southern California and spent a considerable amount of time with Denis' first cousins, Tom and Junior. We had some great times and reminisced with joy over those memories. Denis explained to his mother and father what we were talking about and they listened intently. When Denis relayed some of the conversation to Uncle Christos about my brother Jim, who we called "Big Jim", he really became very interested. Denis was telling his father how "big" Big Jim was, and how he had such a commanding presence. I could see by Uncle Christos' reaction he wanted to share something with all of us, something that had to do with another member of our family who was a "big" man.

The night air was growing cold and a breeze came in from the gulf. Uncle Christos and Denis put the old wooden table away and moved the chairs into the house. It looked like we were being instructed to sit down and listen to a story. Although excited to begin, Uncle Christos first took a bucket from the backyard and shoveled some of the hot embers into it left from the oven. He carried it into the house and placed it in the center of a ring formed by the chairs. As we scooted our chairs closer to the bucket, we could feel the comforting warmth emanating from it.

Now we were ready for the story. A very excited Uncle Christos started talking quickly and Denis had to slow him down so he could translate for me. The story of the "Big Bala," as told by Christos Ballas, goes like this:

Many years ago, about 600 years ago, there lived a relative of ours who was a very brave man. He lived during a very dark period in the history of Greece; a period when Greece was occupied by the foreign invaders from Turkey. These Turkish invaders were referred to by the history books as being from the Ottoman Empire. They were mean and fierce invaders and once they took over our country they ruled the people with an iron hand. They marched on village after village with reckless abandon. As they pummeled through each village they either enslaved or killed all the Greek men, and had their way with any of the Greek women they wanted. It is said that most Greeks born during this Turkish occupation were born with the tainted, evil blood of these cruel invaders.

But, some of the Greeks did not give in to these invaders without a fight. Even when their village was overtaken and they appeared helpless, the men escaping torture or death formed small guerilla bands. Our family village of Kiato was one such village where a small group of men escaped and

hid out in the nearby hills. The leader of this band was our great-great-great grandfather, who was named Georgius Kelaris.

Georgius Kelaris was a very tall and strong man. He was well over seven feet tall and carried a very long sword. In fact, only a man of his great height could carry such a sword because it would drag on the ground if a shorter man tried to carry it.

Christos was really excited at this point; he stood up and raised his hand horizontally over his head as far as he could to indicate the great height of this man, Kelaris. Now I understood why Christos became so animated when Denis was talking about my brother, Big Jim, a few minutes earlier. A relative of ours, who lived 600 years ago, was over 7 feet tall. That's six inches taller than Big Jim! Christos was really enjoying this part of the story. He ran across the kitchen and motioned that the long sword would run from end to end of the room. Christos continued:

Georgius was also very clever. He and his band of guerrillas fought for years against the Turks. After sneak attacks on the Turkish encampment, Georgius and his fighters would run off and hide deep into the hills that surrounded Kiato. They had several hiding places which made it impossible for the Turkish army to track them down. The Turks became increasingly agitated with Georgius and his fighters. It was becoming difficult for the Turks to keep Kiato under their control because they were losing so many men in these guerrilla raids.

In an act of desperation, the Turkish commander offered a reward to any Greek citizen who would provide information as to the whereabouts of Georgius Kelaris. It was hard to believe any fellow Greeks would actually help the Turks, but some did. In fact, it was Georgius' own brothers who came to the Turkish commander and told him of the current hiding place of their fighting brother. Georgius was captured and placed in a fenced corral that held the horses and cattle at the Turks encampment.

On the first night of Georgius' captivity the Turkish guards checked on him and saw that the walls were so high he could never escape. However, they were wrong because during the dead of night, Georgius Kelaris, a strong man of over seven feet in height, lifted one of the horses over the high wall, climbed the wall himself, and rode away into the night.

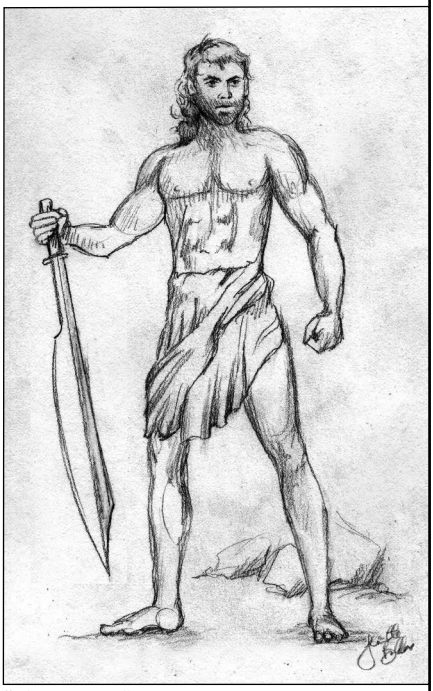
The next morning, the Turkish commander was furious. He had lost his prisoner after only one day in captivity. The commander wondered, "How could this Kelaris man be so strong to have done such a thing, how could he lift a horse over a wall that was almost 10 feet high!" So, he told the people that if they would get word to Kelaris and ask him to come back to the encampment and demonstrate how he lifted the horse over the wall he would gain the respect of the entire Turkish army and, at the same time, would gain his freedom forever.

Georgius heard this offer and was intrigued by the chance to live as a free man forever. A few days later, Georgius proudly rode directly into the encampment and into the corral. He dismounted then lifted his own horse over the wall and climbed over it just as he had done on the night of

his capture. However, instead of setting him free, the Turkish soldiers set a trap for Georgius and re-captured him before he could ride away. Wanting no more escape attempts by this guerilla fighter, the Turkish commander had Georgius quickly beheaded.

At this point I was stunned. Not only had I just found out one of our relatives was such a brave and strong man, but he also had his head chopped off. And, that our family name was Kelaris! In a panic, I asked Denis to ask his father why we are today called Ballas. He relayed my question and Christos was ready to continue:

During the years when the Turks were fighting with Georgius and trying to capture him, the soldiers had all come to witness Georgius yield his big sword. It seems that the word the Turks used for a sword was something like "pala". As they told stories and recounted battles with Georgius, the Greeks heard these strange Turks speaking and thought they were saying "bala," and heard them referring to him as the "Big Bala". So, as the years went on, and the stories of the bravery and strength of Georgius Kelaris were told, the Greeks themselves started to call him by the name Big Bala. The name "Big Bala" eventually became more common and evolved from Bala to Balas and finally to the Greek spelling of ***Ballas****.*



"The Big Bala", as seen through the imagination and creativity of Jennette Ballas.

So there you have it. Our distant relative, Georgius Kelaris, through his strength, bravery and big sword, gave rise to our family name of Ballas. At this point, we were all very tired, Christos was out of breath and it was time for bed. Wow, what an evening!

Morning Walks Again

Just as Christos and I walked each morning during my first visit, we did so again, only this time with Denis. It was great having Denis along because he could translate for me and introduce me to all of his father's friends on the walk through town. The Greeks were all very enthusiastic to meet me. Many of the men spoke some English and did not to hesitate to tell how me how much they liked America. Some had even been to the America themselves. They visited relatives in cities which had

large Greek populations like New York, Chicago, and Detroit. One man mentioned a city in Ohio and noted a Ballas had a large car dealership there. I think I knew about this Ballas from Ohio who owned one of the biggest dealerships in the Midwest. I don't know if we are related to him or not.



Typical mud hut, similar to what Demetrius and Eleni lived in with their eight boys who slept on benches nailed to the perimeter wall.

We walked and talked and had a good time. Once we "got the blood flowing" with a shot of whiskey and a coffee, we found Christos' brother Theodoros. We all had a good chat and went to Theodoros' house. He lived on the original property where the house all the brothers were born in was located. The original house was a small rectangular, one room structure. I was told this house where Demetrius, Eleni and the eight boys lived in was very basic. It had benches nailed to the walls around the perimeter where the boys would sleep. Imagine, eight boys lying head toe around the whole inside of a house. There was no indoor plumbing, no running water, and only a stove for cooking and for warmth. The toilet was outside someplace and very crude. This was a pretty typical house for a poor village back in the late 1800's. It is evident why Demetrius' had dreamed of giving his family a better life because, around the turn of the century, things in Kiato were pretty rough.

The original house was no longer standing at the time I was there. It had been knocked down by an earthquake. Over the years, the area around Kiato experienced earthquakes often. Homes built out of mud and clay, like the original Ballas house, were not very sturdy and were damaged or destroyed by these frequent quakes. *(This last trip I made to Kiato when J.D., Angela, and cousin Gus were there provided us with a little excitement. We were staying in the local hotel when, in the middle of the night, the building shook, rocked and rolled. We were experiencing an earthquake, just as our family had many times before!)*

Uncle Theodoros and his son, Kostas (Con), lived in separate houses they built on the original property. Theodoros lived with his wife, Anna, who was a very loving person with a generous heart. She did not speak English, but communicated with me by her smile and the look in her eyes. While the men were talking and drinking, she was always busy working in the house or the garden, and did so with a certain caressing tenderness.

Con was the youngest of their children. He had never traveled to Australia like his brothers and sisters and as a consequence he did not speak a word of English. Having Denis along this time was again very

helpful. I had the chance to really get to know Con and his lovely wife, Maria, along with their children, Theo and Nikolitsa (Niki). Con is a big, strong guy who loves to hunt and run with his buddies. He was not only an avid outdoorsman but he also had a musical talent and played the basukia in a band.

I spent about 10 days on that trip to Kiato. We took short day trips into the mountains and along the coastal cities. Denis was always taking me to new places, introducing me to the Greek way of life, which was filled with good food and happy people. He told me some interesting things about the family; like how Old Demetrius had always planned his youngest son, Theodoros, would remain in Greece and maintain the family property and Ballas name in the home country, or how the money paid by the railroad as compensation for Con's accident in America way back in the early 1900's went to pay for Christos' house.

After exploring the country during the day, we always came back to Christos' house for dinner and a quiet evening. On one particular night, I could tell Christos had another story to tell. This time, I knew what to expect; after we ate and moved the chairs inside, we sat around the warm bucket of embers that Christos dug out from the oven. His story for the night went like this:

Many, many years ago we had another ancestor who was very big and strong. He was from a time when peoples from North Africa sailed the Mediterranean Sea and visited places like Greece, Italy and Sicily. The visitors who came to Greece were sometimes friendly and traded goods with our people, but sometimes they were bad and tried to rob and steal from us. These African invaders came to almost all the coastal towns of Greece. They sailed across the big Mediterranean then they entered the Aegean Sea and came to the Peloponnese which is our part of Greece. They came to an area not too far from here, a coastal area overlooking the islands of Poros and Hydros. This part of the coast is flat at the top and is home to orchards of orange and lemon trees. The edge of this area of land drops off to the sea from with its very steep cliff and rocky outcroppings.

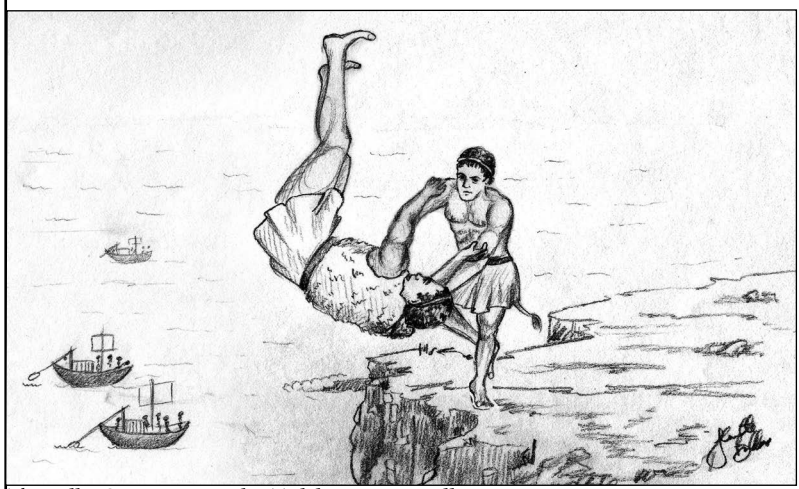
In those days we had family living near this coast. One of the men from our Ballas family was this big strong man I am telling you about. He was known to fear no one. He was from old times and had a short tail at the base of his spine. It was thought in those days that men with a tail like his possessed extra strength.

Christos was really into the story now. He was so excited he ran around the room holding his hand on his lower back and showing us where the tail was located on the Ballas strong man. "What?" I thought to myself, "A tail? Now this is going to be good!" As he was continuing the story, Christos took an orange from the kitchen counter and began to peel it. He threw the rind into the bucket of hot embers, and within moments, a wonderful smell radiated from the bucket making the whole room come alive. The smell of an orange, accompanied by a slight breeze coming off the Gulf of Corinth we could feel through the kitchen window, seemed to

transport us back in time, back in the time of our story as Christos continued:

One day, a ship anchored off the rocky coast and from it came a smaller boat filled with strange looking men. Among them was a giant of a man who stood out among all the rest. While the Greeks gathered on the cliffs above to view the arriving visitors, the booming voice of the big man could be heard: "We come to take what we want, and anyone who tries to defy us will meet with death. But, if one of you will challenge me to a fight, and if he wins this fight, we will we leave this place and you will all be spared." The Greeks knew the only one among them that would have a chance in a fight with the giant would be their countryman, the strong Ballas with the tail. When Ballas heard this and realized his people's fate was in his hands, he came to the edge of the cliff and shouted: "I will fight you. Come up to this high place and we shall wrestle, and if I win, you shall all get in your boat and sail away".

So there we have it. The Ballas with the tail was going to wrestle a giant from Africa. Now, according to those who have handed down this story through the generations, Ballas was not only very strong, but he was also very cunning. While the Greeks and the Africans were assembling around a makeshift wresting ring, Ballas offered a gift to the giant: a vest made of animal fur. The giant took the vest and put it on for the fight. He then boasted to his fellow Africans, "The Greek gives me a gift, but I will kill him anyway." Now, in keeping with the tradition of Greek wrestling, and as he prepared to do battle, Ballas rubbed olive oil all over his chest and arms.



The Ballas Strong man with a Tail, by Jennette Ballas.

This was typically done by wrestlers to show off their bodies and accentuate their muscles.

As the match began, it was easy to see that the giant was much stronger than Ballas, but when he tried to grab his opponent, his hands

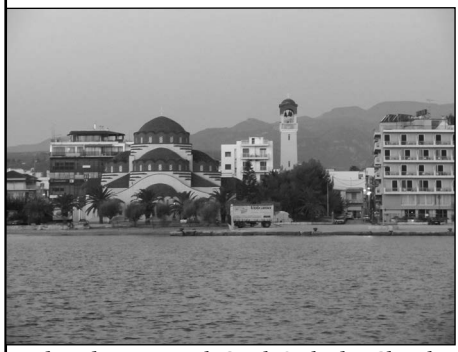
slipped off. The clever Ballas knew the olive oil made would make it very difficult to get a grip. The giant chased and tried to grab Ballas, but he couldn't get a firm hold on him. After the giant became frustrated and very tired from chasing him around the ring, Ballas moved in to make his move. The animal vest made it easy for Ballas to get a good grip and when he did, he lifted his opponent over his head for all to see. The afternoon sun glistened off the oily skin of the Ballas strongman as he carried the giant over to the edge of the cliff, lifted him high above his head, and then threw him over the edge. The Greeks cheered their hero, while the Africans stared in disbelief as the body of the strongest among them bounced off the jagged rocks of the cliff wall. The Africans then went down the cliff and quietly boarded their small boats. They rowed out to the bigger boat and sailed away.

So, now we have it. Christos could really tell stories. First, a seven foot tall Ballas whose original name was Georgius Kelaris, and now an ancestor with a tail! Christos believed these stories to be true; and now, I do, too.

Chapter 8

Greece and Our Homeland Today

In and Around Kiato with and the Family



Modern day Kiato with Greek Orthodox Church near the water's edge on the Gulf of Corinth.

If you were to visit our beloved town of Kiato, you would see a very active community, streets busy with foot traffic, scooters and cars, and restaurants lining the beaches along the shoreline of The Gulf of Corinth. The town has really grown since the old days. High rise buildings abound and the coastline has been developed for tourism and retirement homes. However, this is still some small town charm, especially when you visit the Ballas property purchased by Old Demitrius. Best of all, you would get to meet Louie, Sam, Bill and Con and their families.

The Ballas property encompassed eight to ten small square blocks. It was located just south of the railroad tracks running through town. At one end of the property is the original location of the Ballas house, where the simple structure once stood that was home to Old Demetrius, Eleni, and the eight boys. All that remains from the old days is a section of the animal stalls which were put up behind the house. These stalls are where Christos and Theodoros hid from the Germans during the war. In place of the old house is a newer home where Con and Maria and their family now live. About one block over and one block closer to the railroad tracks is the corner where Louie and Sam built their multi-story apartments (the corner of Platonos and Evripidou). Farther on down the street is Bill's single family home which he built in fulfillment of his promise to return to Kiato.

The toughest thing about going back to Kiato for a visit is choosing where to go first. In my case, I only get back there about once every five years or so and the anticipation of seeing my cousins is at its peak. Usually, Bill is visiting with the locals at a downtown café, or at the old train station close to his house (which is now a café/restaurant), so I try to meet Louie or Sam first. I never want to slight or offend either one, so the safest approach to this dilemma is to stand in the middle of the street between the two Ballas homes and shout: "Hey, cousins, it's Jeff from America, I'm here." (If it is nap time, I usually have to yell a little louder and wait a few minutes.) This way, whoever hears me first is the one I gravitate towards. If either Louie or Sam was already outside tinkering around in the yard or relaxing under the shaded patios outside the apartments, one of them may see me coming up the street. That's when Eva and Katarina, and all the grandkids would be all called to gather and greet me. Then, all pandemonium breaks out; everyone hugs and kisses me at

once, and talks in a frenzied Greek/English combination. A moment like this snaps me out of my jet-lag in an instant and makes feel alive and full of joy.

When things finally settle down I am usually forced to eat something. If I end up at Louie's and Katarina's, I hear news about their daughters. Anna, the oldest and the one who came to stay with us in California, is living in Bethpage, New York. It seems a long way from Greece and one would think she doesn't get to see her parents very much. On the contrary, Anna is a senior flight attendant for Delta Airlines, and she flies the New York (JFK) to Athens non-stop route at least once a month. On her layover, Anna has time to travel to Kiato. This makes her family very happy and keeps them connected. The other daughter, Voula, is usually busy these days teaching yoga and other exercise classes in nearby Corinth. Her husband, Fanni, is an engineer and works locally. They have two children who grow by leaps and bounds (Anastasia and Leo).

Across the street where Sam and Eva live you will find their two adult children. Anna, an English teacher, is always great to see. She is full of energy and looks younger every time I see her. She has helped me many times with spelling and pronunciation of Greek names and places. Anna has excellent command of English and even corrects my grammar when I misspeak. Her husband, a strappingly handsome man, has property up in the hills outside of Kiato and grows Sultana grapes for export. They have two children.

Sam's and Eva's second child is a son is named Theo, in the Greek tradition after his grandfather, Theodoros. He is a few years younger than Anna and is also married with two children. While he and his wife are working, Grandma Eva takes care of the kids.

After a day or so of eating, drinking and relaxing with the relatives we usually take some day trips. Louie and Sam like to go for rides and show their guests the sights. We visit historic places like the theatre at Epidaurus, old monasteries, and a few small museums. We always see interesting places and stop along the way for a good meal. Louie and Sam seem to run into someone they know on every stop. Whether it's a church, a restaurant or a highway point of interest, people come up to say hello. Yes, our Ballas cousins are well-known and very well-liked back in the country of their birth.

Although the places we go to are fascinating to see, I still look forward to just relaxing around Kiato and taking pleasure in the great food we enjoy right in the homes of Louie and Sam. Their wives, Katarina and Eva, are wonderful cooks. They make the most simple food taste marvelous. Among their specialties are grilled meat (lamb or beef) roasted chicken, moussaka, and pastitso. With every meal we always have fresh vegetables (that's the Greek way) seasoned with olive oil freshly pressed from olives they grow themselves. Louie and Sam have their own private stash of fresh pressed olive oil and to see them dip a jug into a small vat and scoop out some oil for dinner is a thing to behold. The smell, color,

and flavor of that oil are unparalleled.

On any trip to Greece, the one thing my brothers, nieces and nephews who have traveled with me can all agree on, is the Greek salad we have on a daily basis is the one thing we love the most. It may sound simple, but the way Katarina or Eva prepares that salad is an exceptional work of art. The tomatoes, cucumbers and onions are seasoned perfectly and taste so fresh. The feta cheese, mixed in at the end, tops it off and makes the dish a true delicacy. We try to duplicate that salad when we get back home to the States, but our recipe always comes up a bit short. Maybe that's why we always look forward to returning to visit our family. We enjoy the simple pleasures in life and eating a Greek salad with our family is one of them.



Greek Salad; simple but elegant.

A Tourist in Greece

There is no doubt it would be worth it to travel half way around the world just to see our family in Kiato. However, while you are there it is an absolute must to see other parts of Greece and discover some of its many treasures.

Greece has so much to offer; history, beauty and an atmosphere of relaxation to escape the 21st century chaos. Eighty percent of the country consists of mountains or hills, making Greece one of the most mountainous countries of Europe. Additionally, it has 16,000 kilometers of rugged and beautiful coastlines. The Greek Islands, each unique it its own way, make Greece incomparable to any country on the European continent.

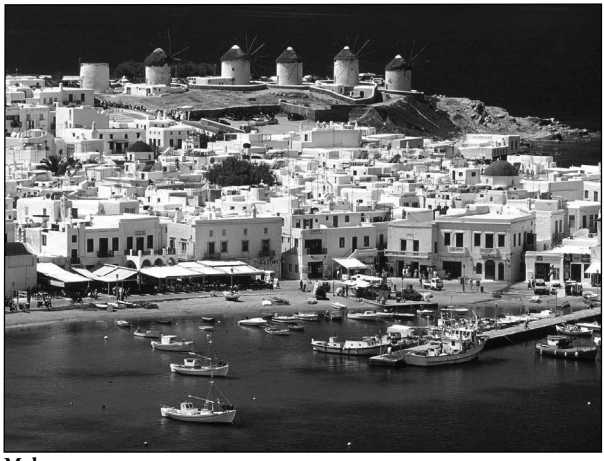
To be Greek and to visit Greece will make you proud. The historical sites you will see and read about along the way will reveal Greece's prominent place in world history. Modern Greece traces its roots to the civilization of Ancient Greece, generally regarded as "the cradle of western civilization." Greece is considered the birthplace of democracy, Western philosophy, and the Olympic Games. Classical works of art, with ideal proportions and beauty, come from Greek artists. Significant contributions to Western literature, political science, and scientific and mathematical principles were made by Greek scholars.

If the knowledge and insight gained from understanding Greece's place in history is not enough, then seeing the beauty of the country is guaranteed to impress you. Grab a tour book or visit a travel website and prepare yourself to see some of the most beautiful places in the world;

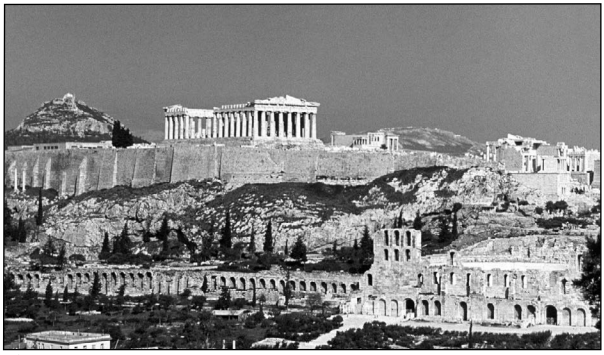
both natural and man-made wonders like, Athens and the Acropolis (Akropolis), the island of Mykonos and its hundreds of white-washed churches and buildings, Meteora, Epidaurus Theatre, the Ancient Port of Pythagoreion, Hydra island (no motorized vehicles allowed), the architecture of Santorini, Vikos Gorge, the beaches of Crete, Melissani Cave, and Mount Athos and Mount Olympus, just to name a few.



Epidaurus Theater



Mykonos



The Acropolis Hill



Ancient Port of Pythagoreion



Meteora Monastery



Hydra Island



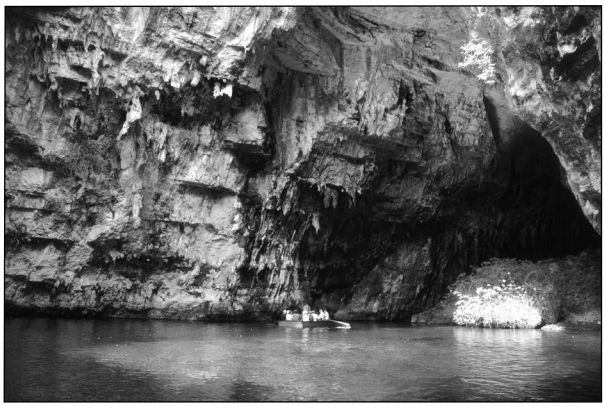
Santorini



Vikos Gorge



Beach on Crete



Melissani Cave



Mount Athos



Mount Olympus

Above all, the Greek people are the best. They are the most open, friendly and endearing people on earth, and that's if you are just a foreign tourist! If you mention you are from Greek ancestors, and you came to Greece to visit your family, and your Grand-Papou´, Demetrius Ballas, came from a small village on the Gulf of Corinth, you will become part of a magical connection with whomever you meet. The Greek people will open their homes and their hearts to you, and offer hospitality like no other. Those you meet may tease you a little if you don't speak Greek, but being one of them makes you their kindred mate.

What does all this mean to us the distant relatives of the ancients? Well, discover for yourself and see what it will bring to your life. See what being "uniquely Greek" means to you.

Chapter 9

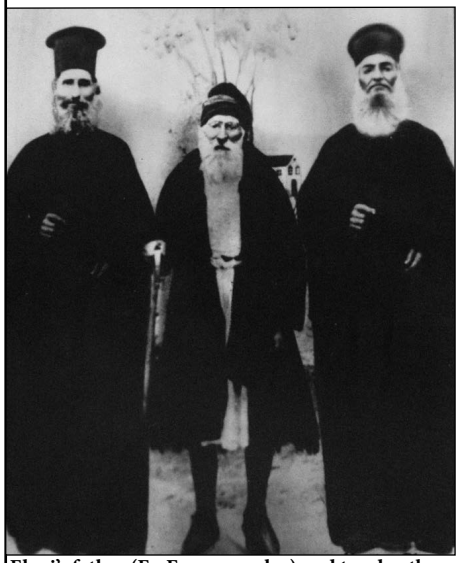
Support from the Wives and Mothers We Love

The basic theme of The Ballas Story is one of a father and his sons search for a better life. In all, Old Demetrius had eight sons (and poor Eva who that passed away as an infant). Naturally, this makes the story of our family a male-dominated one. In this story we are found to be unique, engaging, and a pretty interesting bunch of characters. The men in the family met the challenges of moving to new countries, battled language and cultural barriers, and without the benefit of formal education, became fairly successful. This is all very nice and fun to read about and should lead us all to a fuller appreciation of being uniquely Ballas.

One may also come to the alternate conclusion the Ballas men are just an extremely lucky group of men. They somehow became successful in their new countries in spite of their highly questionable decision making, risk taking, and blindly following a "dream" for a better life. I suggest the secret to their success was Old Demetrius, all of his sons, and all of his grandsons picked extremely wonderful women to marry. Call it good decision making, destiny, or just plain luck, but the women in their lives were instrumental in making The Ballas Story a positive one for us all.

I have chosen to highlight the following women with a "biased biography" of each. It is biased because it is my personal perception of these women and my opinion on how they made the Ballas men successful. Please accept my apologies for leaving anyone out; these are the only ones I have information on, or personally know at this time.

Eleni



Eleni's father (Fr. Frangopoulos) and two brothers; Orthodox priests.

One can only imagine the strength and fortitude it took to see her children leave for America without knowing if she would ever see them again. Old Demetrius had the plan, but without Yiayia Eleni it could never have materialized. It was Eleni who stayed and kept the remaining members of the family together. She was responsible for their health and safety during the tough times of war, famine and poverty which plagued the Greek nation.

I picture Eleni as a kind and gracious woman; a woman of strong faith in God who was dedicated to caring for her family and for others. Her father, Frangop-

oulos (first name unknown), was a priest, as were two of Eleni's brothers. Her upbringing in a religious family must have instilled in her the basic tenets of living and practicing a good Christian life.

Eleni lived with Demetrius on the Ballas family property located near the main road coming down from the surrounding hill country into Kiato. In those days, there were always travelers passing through Kiato on their way to Athens and the port city of Pireaus. Some of these travelers were constant beggars, the ones they called "gypsies". They would come to Kiato and beg for food and provisions. Most people had disdain for these gypsy beggars and would refuse them help. Not Eleni, she took pity on them. When she would see them coming down the road, she would offer what little food she had and allow them to sleep on the Ballas property. Eleni cleaned a place in the open stalls behind the main house and made them as comfortable as possible. Word got around and every begging gypsy would find their way to the Ballas' place. They knew they would be treated with kindness. Eleni was known for this charitable outreach and was admired by all the local townspeople. The reputation she built in the old days has had a lasting effect. Even today, the Ballas Family is considered a well-known and respected family known for its generosity by all those in Kiato.

The Wives of Six of Demetrius' Sons

Grandma Lucy

Born, Lucia Basile in Naples, Italy, the wife of the oldest of Demetrius' sons is undoubtedly the strongest female figure in the American Ballas Family. She was at her husband's side through the development of the family business. She raised her children on the principles of hard work and a strong faith in God. Grandma survived the loss of two infant children to influenza, kept the family businesses from failing during the Great Depression, and saved money to help the family back in Greece after the war.

Grandma was a very kind person. She was a tremendous cook, and although Italian cooking was her specialty, she learned to prepare delicious Greek dishes for Grandpa. It was at Grandma's house were the family often gathered. She put on a feed for all the Ballas' that lived in the area around Savanna. When her family from Chicago was in town, they came, too. Some of my fondest childhood memories come from the times we got together at Grandma's. She cooked mounds of food and made everyone feel welcome.

Grandma was small in stature, but large in presence. Everyone in Savanna knew her; the Italian ladies in town would seek her help and advice. Before she married Grandpa, she had to raise her younger siblings after her mother died in a kitchen fire. Her energy was endless and without her strength and resolve the family would not have fared nearly as well

as it did.



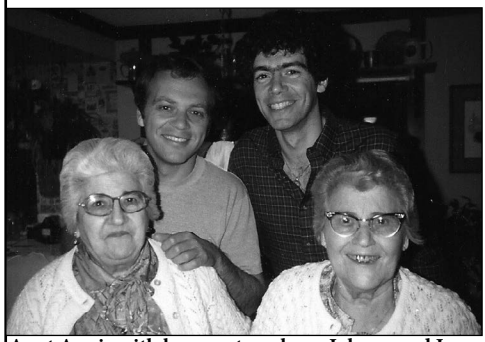
Grandma Lucy with J.D.'s daughters, Jennette and Elizabeth.

Grandma Lucy was the matriarch of the family. I will always remember the loving, but very hard, pinch on the cheek she would give all of us grandkids. If we were misbehaving, she endearingly called us little "strunzees" ('little shits' in Italian). Perhaps the most remarkable accomplishment in her life is putting up with Grandpa's eccentricities. He was not an easy person to live with. He was very demanding, wanting his supper at a certain time and with a salad and pasta as a side to every meal. Grandpa would drink (sometimes to excess) and after eating he would retire to his favorite chair and light his pipe, often carelessly burning his good shirts. Grandma took it in stride; she simply placed a towel on his chest to save his shirts and watched him so he didn't burn down the house.



Grandma with Jim's kids, Jimmy, Christopher and Kirsten.

I would be remiss if I didn't give Grandma a majority of the credit for the accomplishments of her sons and daughters. She raised smart, respectful children who succeeded in life due to her guidance.



Aunt Annie with her great nephews Johnny and Joe.

Aunt Annie, Auntie Forta, and Auntie Anna

These three wives of Grandpa's brothers were similar in many ways. I call them my Aunts, to some of you they would be called Yiayia´. They were quiet and unassuming, yet carried themselves with an air of confidence. And, they were absolutely loyal and loving to their husbands. Aunt Annie, Grandma Lucy's sister, supported Uncle Louie in all of his crazy ventures. Louie was the vagabond of our American family. He would come up with one idea for a

business, work at it awhile, and then start another. He had Annie constantly moving from the farm to Savanna, and back again. Annie never complained and they never openly argued. If Louie was out drinking and drawing pictures in the local bars, Annie was home making supper; it would always be ready whenever he came home.


Yiayia (Grandmother) Forta with Christos.

On the Greek side, Christos' wife, Auntie Forta, was a very kind and warm person. She never looked rushed or in a hurry. When she attacked those chickens in the backyard she was quick and decisive. Uncle Christos could just walk away, visit with friends all day long, and Forta would be taking care of the household chores. She had the prettiest and kindest smile I have ever seen. There was something about her that just made you want to hug her. She had light-colored eyes, and one that kind of drooped a bit, which made her all the more sweet and special. When she met me for the first time, I was a stranger to her who couldn't speak a word of Greek, but the welcome and warmth she extended to me was absolutely pure and genuine. She immediately made me feel I was with family and where I belonged.


Yiayia (Grandmother) Anna with Theodoros.

When I first saw Auntie Anna, Theodoros' wife, she was working in the garden alongside the family home. It was a big garden and she was tilling the soil with a hand plow. She had the strongest, thickest hands I have ever seen on a woman and I could tell she did all the hard around the house. Anna may have looked strong on the outside, but she was a gentle soul on the inside. She was a loving wife and mother. It was Anna who kept the house in order while her husband Theodoros was out socializing. She saw her seven of her eight children leave her for Australia, but Anna did not waiver. She was the anchor for her family and was always there for them.

These three women, wives of three very lucky Ballas men,

without calling attention to themselves and without a lot of fanfare, were largely responsible for the successes of their children.

Diana and Christina

These two women were courageous in their own right. They came to America as very young and inexperienced women. They came from small villages in Greece with no idea what to expect when they agreed to be part of the Ballas Family. Being a young bride is difficult enough, but these women left their homes and families, and moved 5,000 miles away with no promises of ever returning to their homeland. They fought language and cultural barriers. They braved the long and frigid winters of Wisconsin.



Christina learning how to live on a farm in America; tending to the family cow.

Christina raised two boys, and Diana raised four, each was educated and became successful. Christina's son Gus tells me his mother was strict but fair, and she was a great cook. He said of Diana, "She was even stricter than my own mother with her four sons. They were raised Greek and came to first grade without knowing a word of English." The leap of faith these women took was admirable. They supported their husband's efforts on the farms in Antigo, Wisconsin and stayed with them through thick and thin. Without Christina and Diana, the dream for a better life may not have come true for Bill and Sam.



Diana (center) with three of her boys and Christina.

The Next Generation's Wise Choices

My Mother; Rosemary

Old Demetrius' grandsons were very lucky with their choices of spouses as well. In my humble opinion, my Dad, the first of the grandsons, was the luckiest man on earth because he married my Mother. Dad set the standard for his brothers and cousins when it came to picking a

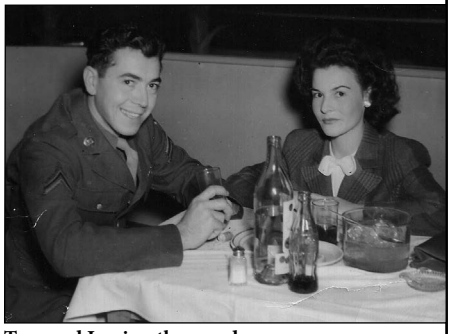
wife. If they were lucky enough to marry someone like my Mother, they had it made.



Rosemary and Jim, circa 1944.

My Mother is kind and good, she was pretty as a young woman and has aged with beauty. She is smart, social, and outgoing. When she lost Dad, she was only 42 years old. A partial list of her accomplishments in the face of difficulty looks like this: She carried on with the family business after Dad died, she would often work at the tavern until 2:00 am, and go home alone with hundreds of dollars stuffed in a money bag to keep it safe before she could get to the bank. She raised four sons who turned out pretty well, raised a special needs little girl, paid for private college for all of us boys, and maintained a sophisticated and revered stature in the community. When we were all nearly out of college, Mom sold the tavern and moved back to Wisconsin to be with her mother. She saw an old high school friend who had just lost his wife, married him and raised seven of his ten children.

As I write this section of the story, Mom is still alive at the tender age of 93. She maintains no man could ever take the place of my Dad and her love for him will live forever. Mom's charming personality has not dampened; she entertains all the staff workers and residents at her assisted living home with wit and old sage advice. She encouraged me to write this story, reads it with interest, and tells me not to brag too much about the Ballas'. Mom says nobody is as special as they think they are!



Tom and Louise, the war days.

Colleen and Louise in America

Aunt Colleen and Aunt Louise made it possible for Junior and Tom to succeed. They were supportive of their husbands in the move from Savanna to California. The kept their children in school and on a steady

path so they could succeed on their own. Colleen is extremely intelligent, well-read, and always trying to improve her knowledge through advanced college and self-taught studies. She supports the kids, and now the grandkids, and is there for all of them, doing what Junior would do if he was still alive. Aunt Louise has remained single since Tom's death. She has said no man out there could take the place of Tom, who was the love of her life.

Katrina and Eva in Greece



Grandmother Katrina

Katarina and Eva (Evanthia), now living in Greece, actually came from small villages around Kiato. They married Louie and Sam in Australia, supported them in the challenges of the new country, and supported them on the move back to Greece. On any visit to Greece, seeing them is the highlight. They exude kindness and love. Although they only married into the family, they treat every Ballas who visits as one of their very own.

Eva, at times very quiet, is a thinker, a great mother and a fantastic cook. She can make even the simplest dish taste like heaven. Katarina, on the other hand, is outgoing and vocal. She teases Louie about his broken English, tells him what to say and when to say it, and then she corrects him while he's trying to speak. She is fiery, funny, and her smile lights up the room. Katarina cooks like an angel and serves her meals with delight. You can't go wrong if you end up in the middle of the street between their respective homes and wander over to one of them. You will probably see them doting over their grandchildren, but on your approach, they will treat you as a very special guest and with hugs and kisses you will see how they love you. Lucky men, those brothers Louie and Sam!



Grandmother Eva

Boots

Boots (the sweet, short, strong woman whose full name was

Beatrice) supported her husband, Gus, and loved him dearly. She was of Irish decent and knew nothing about the "Greek" way of life, but survived the marriage of cultures and grew to love her in-laws, Bill and Christina. Boots was Catholic and she and Gus were married by a Catholic priest. Her faith was very important to her and she raised all four of her kids Catholic.

Boots was always fun to be around. She had the nicest little laugh and smile. Maybe it was an Irish thing, but she formed a special friendship with Uncle Junior's wife, Colleen, who was also proudly Irish. They got together often and joined Junior and Gus in forming a very close relationship. Boots and Gus traveled a lot, especially to square dancing events. Yes, square dancing! I guess anything can happen when you mix a Greek man with an Irish woman.

No doubt About the Rest

I have no doubt about the rest of the grandsons' fortune in finding a mate. I have met a few and found Denis' wife, Christine, a great person to be around. She is fun to go out with in a social setting; she is engaging, talkative and loves to laugh. Con's wife, Maria, in Greece, is a very pretty woman, bright, very supportive of Con's lifestyle (hunting with his buddies and playing music). Maria has beautiful smile and she uses it to communicate with those of us who do not speak Greek.

Let's not forget Old Demetrius also had 11 granddaughters. They all married and many chose spouses who do our family proud. Carolyn, daughter of John in Savanna, married a very good and kind husband. She dearly loved her Bob Sievert; they ran a tavern and restaurant in Mt. Carroll, Illinois (about 10 miles from Savanna) and raised five children who are all proud to be one-half Ballas.

Louie and Annie's daughter, Helen, married a very good man named Joe Moll. When Hitler's forces invaded his home country of Holland during World War II, Joe risked his life in a successful escape and made his way to America. He too, searched for a better life. He found it and also found Helen. They are soul-mates, and together, have raised five beautiful children.

For the granddaughters who migrated to Australia, the spouses they chose have added strength to our family. Most of them married Greek men with names like: Apostolakis, Katharios, Stavropoulos, and Koutrodimos. These husbands have helped the Ballas girls raise families which would make Old Demetrius a very happy man.

The list of spouses goes on and on and I have no doubt the Ballas luck carried on for them.

And, on to the next generation

My brothers and I, along with the rest of us in this generation, are

the great-grandchildren of Demetrius. Most of the marriages and spousal choices of our generation have been lasting and fruitful. They are predicated on a strong faith in God and dedicated to uphold the promises made in marriage. The many great spouses of these Ballas men and women have helped make this entire generation and its offspring a proud and strong legacy to Old Demetrius.

In the case of my own three brothers, their marriages survived and are strong today because of who they married. John, Big Jim, and Joe fell upon extremely good fortune when they met their wives.

John married Paulette Passalaqua, who he met in college. She is from a strong Italian family and she's all about family, love and togetherness. Paulette faced the loss of their daughter, Bridgette, with strength and resolve. She is not afraid to speak her mind and to openly discuss her feelings on how difficult it has been to accept Bridgette's loss, yet she encourages everyone to continue on with their lives. She has been rock-solid in helping John, and their daughters Lisa and Beth Anne, in dealing with life without Bridgette. Paulette is a gracious host, always having parties at her house and inviting every family member in Southern California to partake in her wonderful cooking extravaganzas. John is one lucky man to have Paulette by his side.

Big Jim married Carol Wieman, from Wisconsin. Carol, like many from that part of the country, is of German and Norwegian heritage. She is a "professional mother." Her life has been dedicated to her four wonderful children. She is blonde, pretty and smart. Carol has combined her own Nordic family background with that of Ballas' Greek and Italian roots to produce a uniquely blended family. Two of her children are blond, fair and look German and Norwegian, while the other two look more Greek and Italian. The result is a beautiful combination of four children who represent their collective heritage. Carol has grown very close to all of the Ballas side of the family. Through her genuine kindness and appreciation for family, Carol developed a close relationship with Grandma Lucy and Aunt Carolyn in Illinois, and with Aunt Louise (Uncle Tom's wife) in California. Carol may be blonde and not look like a Ballas, but she is certainly one of us, and we are glad that she is.

My third brother, Joe, married a very wonderful wife as well. Her name is Gail Balisha and she comes from a very tight-knit family in Northern California. Her parents are of Assyrian decent, which is a very proud and ancient culture. Most Assyrians are from the Middle East formerly known as Persia. They were converted to Christianity by the Romans, but as a minority in the region, were eventually displaced by an Arab Islamic Invasion in the 7th century. Although the Assyrians lost their country, their rich culture and heritage lives on today. Gail and her parents have shared these rich traditions with our family and have taught their children to be proud of their unique heritage. Gail's parents were farmers like some of the Ballas', and grew similar crops like; wine grapes, almonds, figs and dates and various other fruits. She has raised her two

children, Joseph and Alexandra (twins), with great love and an appreciation of their combined Greek and Assyrian backgrounds. My brother, Joe, got pretty lucky when he met Gail. She is outgoing, fun and fits right in with our family in the most natural way.

The end result of my brothers' choice of spouses is that I have three wonderful sister-in-laws I love dearly. In addition, they have given me nine nieces and nephews who are the most respectful, intelligent, and beautiful kids in the world. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for joining the Ballas Family and being the best wives and mothers they can be.

One other wife I need to mention is Angela, cousin J.D's wise choice for a spouse. He met Angela while he was attending Notre Dame. She is a very special woman, smart and pretty. She is the daughter of a doctor, a nurse herself, and she has done a remarkable job in raising her children. Angela's task has not been an easy one because their son, Daniel, is a "special needs" child, like Mary Beth. When he was born, J.D. called my brother John and said, "Johnnie, we had a little one like Mary Beth, but he's a boy." It was another shock the family had to absorb and to accept. In addition to having Down's Syndrome, Daniel is autistic. He is a gift from God who requires special care and nurturing. Angela is a great wife and mother, and has taken on the burden of raising a family with a special child all in stride. She has taught her three other children, Jennette, Elizabeth, and Johnnie, to pitch in and do their part in caring for their brother. Their collective effort and selfless love for Daniel has made them a close-knit family we all should be proud to call Ballas. The comment she often makes about Daniel is he is "the gift that keeps on giving". This is indicative of her attitude of accepting with humor and grace what God has chosen to give her and her family.

(Those of us in the generation of great-grandchildren of Demetrius are all proud cousins to each other. There are over seventy of us and we are spread throughout the United States, Greece and Australia. To do this chapter titled; Support From the Wives and Mother We Love, it would take me half a lifetime to get to really get to know this group of cousins and their spouses and even longer to write about them all. Perhaps in future editions as I have suggested in the ***Introduction*** *of this book, we can get to know more about all them.)*

Chapter 10

Who We Are and What it Means to be "Uniquely Ballas"

We are Products of a Dream

I was encouraged by a few family members (J.D.'s daughter, Jennette, in particular) to try and explain what it means to be a Ballas. I think we all have a certain feeling that being a member of the Ballas family makes us a somewhat special breed. Not that we are any better than anyone else, but we all seem to feel very lucky and blessed we come from a unique family.

A first step in trying to figure this out, and to see what makes us "tick" in a weird sort of unique way, is to realize we are products of a dream; the dream Old Demetrius had to make a better life for his family. The manifestation of his dream is evident today because each generation of our family has become stronger, smarter, and more globally minded than the previous one. At the same time, each new generation has been fortunate enough to maintain the individuality and uniqueness we treasure. The dream set the stage and those who followed it made us who we are.

Demetrius himself was strong man and visionary. Who else would have had the courage to take part of his family to America and leave the rest behind? How did he know those who remaining in Greece would be taken care of? Buying small parcels of land on each trip back to the old country was his way of caring for them and demonstrating he indeed had a vision. According to one of the local historians in Kiato, Demetrius was also a very talented tradesman. He worked at odd jobs when he was back to Kiato from trips to America and when he moved back permanently. This historian has documented that a bridge over one of the irrigation ditches nearby was constructed by Demetrius over 100 years ago. It is still standing and is one of the finest of its kind in the area. Maybe that is how his son, Louie, came to be a tradesman himself.

We can look at Demetrius in another way and conclude splitting up the family was a crazy thing to do. It has been said Eleni died of a broken heart because she never again saw five of her sons after they left home. If this is true then Demetrius' plan had some shortcomings. He seems to have been a risk taker who made some mistakes, yet survived to see his dream fulfilled.

If we look back at the earlier Ballas' we see certain individualism and a certain "panache" which made them unique. We see how Demetrius' sons emulated their father when they took their chances on buying farm land in Antigo, and in Savanna when Grandpa John took risks by getting into the grocery and tavern business, then by selling booze during the prohibition.

The next generation including my Dad, and Uncle Tom and Junior displays even more individualism. Dad grew a local tavern into a big success and made the business of owning it a proud endeavor. Uncles Tom and Junior made their California dreams come true. From Greece, cousins who left for Australia, Louie from Theodoros' family, and Bill

from Christos', were the first among their siblings to search for a better life in the land "Down Under". As the rest followed and migrated from Kiato, they all conquered the challenges of making a new life in a new country.

If all of us in the Ballas' family are products of a dream, what exactly has that dream meant to us as individuals and how has it formed us as members of our whole family? I think that we can all agree things turned out pretty well for the Ballas clan. Our early family members persevered through the hard times and difficulties which faced them when they migrated to America and Australia, and those that stayed in Greece survived the poverty, dire economic conditions and even the German occupation of Kiato during World War II. We, "children of a dream", are very fortunate because the sacrifices of those who came before us have placed us in a world with endless opportunities.

The Bond that Connects us all

Things have changed a great deal since Demetrius and John first landed at Ellis Island, but our family's values of hard work, integrity, love and support for each other have not changed. As we have progressed and grown as a family, we have stayed connected in spite of living on three separate continents and being separated by miles and miles of land and ocean. Although we would have to nearly circumnavigate the globe in order to find each other, it would be well worth it. Whenever one of us from America meets one of us from Australia, or if we meet each other in Greece, we will immediately feel welcome, connected, and loved. This undeniable bond between us transcends the distance and time zones separating us; for we are all "Ballas".

How do We Explain Ourselves?

One way to try and explain what kind of people we are in a plain and simple way is to say we are an extremely well-liked group of unconventional immigrant offspring. We make people feel comfortable around us. We are engaging, fun-loving and we make people laugh. In a party, we always have people gravitating toward us. Maybe it's because we don't put on a façade of arrogance or superiority. Rather than being braggadocios, we listen to people and let them feel important. Some of us take over a little more than others, but not in a boorish or overbearing way. We are unique in a world of the commonplace and most everyone enjoys liking a Ballas!

Those of us Born Before 1955 (Or So)

I have created a quasi-group of us who encompass the older members of the family and those of us born just after World War II (up to the year 1955) because we seem to share one characteristic; we are risk

takers and have made our own search for a better life by leaving the cities of our birth. We also share another characteristic; we are not a particular type of people who fit a particular mold. We are not among the smartest people in the world, we are not among the wealthiest, we're not doctors, lawyers, or college professors, nor are we corporate executives or professionals, artists or inventors. Those of us in this group, the sons, grandsons and granddaughters, and great-grandsons and great-granddaughters of Old Demetrius, have retained the entrepreneurial and adventuresome spirit of the old man. We seem to have carried on the spirit of Old Demetrius by our sense of adventure and willingness to take chances. Most of us are self-starters, unconventional, and entrepreneurial. We have made it on our own; like becoming independent farmers in Wisconsin (i.e. the sons of Demetrius: Bill, Sam and Louie), through the businesses we started in America and Australia (i.e. Grandpa John, and the following generation of my Dad, Tom and Junior, and Louie, Bill, Sam, Gus, etc.) and the next group of us who moved to California and started our own ventures (the Sieverts, my brothers, John, Jim and Joe and me, and cousins, Tommy and Terry). The Australian Ballas' in this group that have had their share of risk taking ventures (i.e. Theodoros' Louie, Sam, and their brothers and sisters, Christos's Louie, and Bill, and Helen and her husband, and the others).

Those of us in this group who are still living are either retired or approaching retirement. Most of us have reached the magic age of 60 and hopefully have been granted wisdom in our years. We have the good fortune be a part of the "old days." We remember our grandparents and remember their stories. In our own words, we can describe what it means to be a Ballas to the young generations of our family.

My own insight as to who we are and what it means to be a Ballas comes from the stories I have heard and from the family members I have met. I have compiled a list of family members who help me understand "what makes us tick."

The Best of the Best

Uncle Louie and Uncle Christos

Louie Ballas who came to America when he was a boy, inherited the adventurous gene from his father, Old Demetrius. Louie was always moving from the farm in Antigo to Savanna, then back again and then back again. He was a wandering soul, trying a little bit of everything in his search to make a better life for his family. You never knew where Louie would end up next. The only thing certain is he always made friends along the way. The one constant in Louie's life was he loved people and they loved him. If you knew Louie Ballas, you called him your friend and almost bragged to people about it. You felt special if you knew Louie, he made you feel that way, and he made you feel happy. Louie Ballas, telling

stories in his broken English, was the neatest old man I ever met.

Uncle Christos, Louie's youngest brother, was his clone. When he walked down the street, he was the most popular man in town. It's no wonder why the townspeople declared him the unofficial mayor of our little village of Kiato. His smile was infectious, and his kindness and humbleness were even apparent to total strangers. He seemed to smile through his eyes. There was not a mean bone in Christos' body. Be proud to have him as a brother, father, grandfather, or cousin. It is an honor to be a Ballas because of Christos.

Dad and Uncle Junior

The next generation produced two more Ballas men who exemplify the best of us who followed Demetrius. We are all pretty good people but we pale in comparison to my father, Jimmy Ballas, and his younger brother, Junior. These two men were built with a certain fiber that is indeed a rarity.

When my Dad, Jimmy, died at the early age of 48, he left a legacy most men twice his age couldn't come close to approaching. His death was a shock to the entire town of Savanna and to anyone who ever met him. People who knew him all their lives, as well as those who only may have met him for a brief moment while having a drink in the tavern, were stunned when they heard of his passing. It has been nearly 50 years since his death, but the people in Savanna have never forgotten him. Over the years when any of my brothers or I have visited Savanna, people have always come up to us and tell us how much they loved our Dad. The folks his age are gone now, but their children remember being told about Jimmy Ballas and how engaging he was, how he made everyone feel at ease, and how he made them feel so welcome. Their comments are a testament that he was the nicest damn person that anyone ever met.

More importantly, Dad loved his family with all his heart. His wife, my mother Rosemary, his kids, his parents and his siblings were more important to him than wealth or fame. His life was a mission to care for, and to love his family, and to set an example of what it is to do the right thing in life. Dad's mission was cut short in the physical world, but he continues to live on in the spiritual one. He remains with us and speaks to us often. He constantly reminds us to rethink our thoughts and actions, a sort of gut check if you will, so we do the right thing and refuse to do what is wrong. The best we could ever do is to try to be like Jimmy Ballas, my Dad.

Junior was a lot like his brother Jimmy. He was an absolute joy to be around and he was one of the most outgoing of his generation. He loved to get out and meet people making friends with everyone. Junior was really smart. He was sharp in business and was detail-oriented. He always made you feel at home in his home *(he typified the Spanish saying, " Mi casa es su casa!)* Junior always brought out food or drink to make

you feel comfortable and let you taste Colleen's good cooking. When my brothers and I went to California to work with Uncle Tom in the mobile home business, Junior took over and became our "California Dad." His good advice and genuine love for us gave us a good indication of what it would have been like to have our own father with us.

Louie and Sam

Louie and Sam are similar in some respects, yet different in others. Once they returned from Australia, they fit right in to the life and leisure of their birthplace of Kiato. Everyone holds them in high regard, respects their achievements in Australia, and recognizes they both have a certain humility, and do not flaunt their successes in Australia. They are generous to their less fortunate family and friends who did not make it out of Kiato.

Louie is a blue-eyed Greek, with a smile that could light up a room. He loves to tell a story, much like his Uncle Christos. It is pure entertainment to listen to him and to watch how animated he gets. I remember how his eyes grew as big as saucers when he told me about an incident on a train on his way to Wollongong. When his siblings came to Australia, he had to take a train to meet them at the station. On one of these trips he was confronted by a bunch of drunken Aborigines who broke a beer bottle and held the jagged edge of it against his neck. They didn't harm him; they just took his money and scared him to death. Louie's broken, Australian English also adds to the comedic effect of his stories.

Sam is strong with leathery skin and a definitive Greek nose. He is a good story teller as well, except Sam is a little more serious than Louie. He takes his time and is cool and calm when he tells of his exploits in getting from Greece to Australia and the events which transpired. Likewise, it is a treat to listen to Sam. He doesn't like to be interrupted when he gets going and he sometimes pauses as he searches for the right word in English to use in his story.

Louie and Sam were entrepreneurial and made money by working hard and building business relationships through honesty and integrity. They married wonderful women; strong women who were very grounded while exuding kindness. Their children are good-looking, smart and independent. All of them are Ballas to the core. Their kids emulate their parents; they are bright-eyed and full of life. Louie's daughters, Anna and Voula, are beautiful, with large fascinating eyes and they are always fun to be around. Sam's children; Anna and Theo, are very smart and energetic. Yes, Sam, Louie and their families are some of my favorites for sure!

A Few "Characters" with Character

The Webster's Dictionary had several meanings of the word

"character". One definition says it is the basic make-up of a person or a combination of personality traits of an individual. The word is often used as a compliment such as: moral excellence and firmness <a man of sound *character*>. However, character can have a different meaning. In English slang, we often use the word to explain a person who is a little off center, a little funny or strange, or endearingly special and odd. The Ballas family is full of "characters" fitting both these definitions. It is these real characters in the family that tell us a little more about who we are:

Grandpa John

Of all the real characters in the Ballas Family; Grandpa John, Demetrius' oldest and first son to come to America, was a classic. John worked hard in his early years, but retired while still in his early 50's. When his son Jimmy ran the tavern, John would come to town every few days to get his supply of beer and booze. Coming out the side door of the tavern, he'd carry his libations in two separate bags, a six pack of Schlitz and a bottle of whiskey in each. He would tell us kids one was for Grandma to see, and the other he would hide in the basement. Yeah, sure! Trying to fool Grandma was impossible; she was always a step ahead of her husband John.

Grandpa drove an old 1950 Dodge Desoto, a classic car with a front seat as big as a living room sofa. After having a drink or two in the tavern, he would gather up his two bags and leave by the side door. Old John would stand outside the car and look up and down the street to see if any traffic was coming, then he would slowly proceed to get into the car. After adjusting his straw hat and making sure the bags of beer and whiskey were well settled in, he proceeded to back the car into the street without ever looking again to see if the coast was clear. Grandpa must have thought that because he looked carefully for oncoming traffic once, there was no need to look again. Well heck, a parade could have assembled and passed by from the time it took him to enter the car and start moving! Although Grandpa always survived his rather dubious method of backing out of his parking space, he wasn't done yet. Once he got moving down the street another adventure unfolded. Driving slowly and carefully, he lined up the hood ornament of that old Desoto directly with the center stripe of the road. Cars would all move to the side when they saw old John Ballas driving down the middle of the road like that, the street sort of parted like the Red Sea.

To call Grandpa John a little eccentric is an understatement. When we kids would come over to visit Grandma and him, he got all excited and nervous. He would take us into the bedroom and give us a piece of Wrigley's gum he had hidden in the dresser drawer, sometimes we got a nickel, but whatever Grandpa had for us was accompanied by him saying in a hurried and shaky voice, "Okay kids, now get outside….go away." He loved us, but he loved to be left alone to smoke his pipe even more. He

just plain didn't want to be bothered by kids, noise or anything else.

Despite his oddities, Grandpa was also a character of the other type. He had a firm morals and he was a man of good character. During the depression, Grandpa persevered and cared for his family which carried them through the toughest of times. He helped his brothers whenever they were in need and sent money and clothes to Greece. Grandpa never complained how difficult it was to come to America and learn a new language and culture. He just did it, and in doing so he set an example for his sons to be hard workers and survivors. Grandpa was extremely well-liked by the older citizens of Savanna because of his generosity from his days of owning the grocery store. He was an icon in the community. It was a great loss to the community when died in Savanna in 1966 at the age of 77. John D. Ballas, the oldest son of Demetrius, made a better life for his family by doing it his way.

Gus

Cousin Gus, son of Uncle Bill, grew up in Antigo, Wisconsin on the farm. He knows the old ways of his Greek parents and the new ways of 21st Century. Gus is the happiest, most outgoing of all the Ballas'. He is well known around Santa Barbara as a generous person. Gus was raised Greek Orthodox, but when he married Boots, the service was performed by a Catholic priest. Gus supports both the Orthodox and the Catholic faiths. He says with a chuckle, "I was blessed on both sides." He is always helping out at the church functions whether, Catholic or Greek Orthodox, and provides food for events with his "Grandpa Gus' traveling barbeque."

Gus is full of character; he will talk to anyone about anything. He has a prominent Greek nose, in fact it is very prominent. Gus learned to speak Greek from his Mother and Father when he was very young. When we last went to Greece, Gus was our interpreter. I'm not really sure if he was always understood because his Greek appeared suspect. I know this because when he would talk with his cousins, Louie and Sam, they could only understand about half of what he was saying. Gus knew he was misunderstood at times but he didn't let that deter him. Cousin Sam would laugh and laugh when Gus was trying to tell one of his stories in Greek. Gus would laugh, too and then we all laughed together. It was all in good fun, making light of Gus' inability to speak Greek fluently. The Ballas' are thick skinned and can take a joke, even at their expense. Gus is like that, he can laugh at himself because he is a real man without a pretentious bone in his body. I highly recommend if you want to travel to Greece, go with Gus. The entertainment will be priceless.

Denis

I got to know Denis when he stayed with me in Modesto, California. That was a real treat. Denis and his wife, Christine, filed for travel

papers to return to Australia and needed to be close to San Francisco while they were being processed. Denis is a handsome man, with thick dark hair, and according to my Mom, he looks the most like my Dad than any of the other cousins. Denis can really cook. He spent many years in Florida working as a chef in a fine seafood restaurant. With Christine as his "sous chef," he would make the most elegant meals. Watching him in the kitchen was like watching a crazed conductor lead a symphony. Denis jumped around the kitchen, touched everything with his bare hands (often burning his fingers), threw down his pots and pans and spilled ingredients all over. However, when he was finished he created a masterpiece out of a mess.

Denis and Christine did not have children, but Denis valued family above all. His love of family showed his real character. Denis really enjoyed my brother's children and embraced them as his own. He typified the Ballas urge to travel and was never satisfied staying in one place. He was always on the move like my Uncle Louie; from Australia to Greece, to America, to Australia, then back to Greece, then back to Australia. Denis is a Ballas to the core, a joy to know and good for many laughs and great memories!

Bill

Bill, the son of Christos, reminds me of his Uncle Bill with bushy hair, tall and gangly. Bill has the character which makes us who we are. He started business after business, moving around Australia and always searching for opportunities. Bill made sure all of his brothers and sisters were taken care of before he even got married. He returned to Greece many times to look after his parents and his sister Nota. Bill now sits at the old train station in Kiato, smoking and talking to friends. His presence in the community is reminiscent of his father; friendly, outgoing, and always smiling. Bill is from the old days and from the new ones. He can tell a story and keep you interested for hours. Bill is truly a "character" with character.

(Oh, yes! We have "characters" with "character" throughout our family. No doubt there are many in Australia who fit this description who I haven't met. Somebody should take notes and record the character these Ballas' have to offer. Let us live on through all the "characters" in our family and remain "uniquely Ballas".)

The Last Chapter

A Legacy of Heroes

The greatest wish of any parent and the greatest legacy any parent can leave is to care, love and nourish their children so they will have a better life. Those parents who leave this legacy are true heroes.

The true heroes of The Ballas Story are Demetrius and Eleni. They were willing to separate their family for the good of the whole. Their sacrifices set the stage for the future generations of our family to succeed in a better life.

My Grandpa John, Uncles; Bill, Sam, Louie, Christos and Theodoros continued in the quest for a better life for their children, and their children's children. And, while doing so, instilled a sense of love for the family and solidified the bond which exists between all the Ballas family members. They are heroes and we owe them all a debt of gratitude.

I propose the best way to repay these heroes of the Ballas Family and show our gratitude to them is to live in a way that would make them proud. By following the example of kindness and generosity which Yiayia´ Eleni extended to the poor gypsies of Kiato, we can share our "inheritance" of a better life with those less fortunate.

I further propose we continue to remain in contact with all of our family members as we solidify the bond that connects us. We are spread across the globe in three different continents, but with today's technology we are just a call, text or email away from each other.

We are "uniquely Ballas"; let's keep it that way. Be outgoing and engaging, listen to people, look them in the eyes, and make them feel important. Let's not bury our heads in Smart Phones when we walk down the street or when we are in the company of others; look up, see people and let that Ballas personality come alive.

Be proud to be a Ballas!

Acknowledgements

I have many people to thank who helped me with this writing and with the website. In general, I appreciate all the encouragement given to me my all the family members who knew I had taken on this endeavor and wished me luck.

In particular, I owe a debt of gratitude to the following people; Christopher Ballas, my nephew (son of my brother, Big Jim), for his idea to compliment the book by creating the *TheBallasStory.com* website. He donated much of his personal time and many man-hours of his staff for the creative and technical aspects of both the book and the website. It would not have all come together without those who work for Christopher: Tony Rubino and Jeremy Ferro the creative guys, and Jennifer Wiehl, my editor. I thank them for their energy and genuine interest in the project. Also, thanks to Big Jim for allowing Christopher to ramrod most of this work while he was running their company.

Thanks to Jennette, my beautiful and extremely talented cousin. After Jennette met many of our family members in her travels to Greece and Australia, she realized how lucky and interesting it is to have a family such as ours. Her tireless effort in creating the "Ballas Family Tree" on the Ancestry.com. site, was an inspiration to keep me pressing forward on this project. Jennette is an artist. She created the illustrations of our ancestors of yesteryear in the chapter entitled: "The Amazing Stories of Uncle Christos". Thank you, Jennette!

Thanks to my cousins in Greece; Louie, Sam and Bill, who have provided me with details on the family in Greece and Australia. These guys are my Dad's first cousins. They never met him, but are so much like him. They are kind, generous, outgoing and "uniquely Ballas".

On my last visit to Greece on September of 2012, Anna Tsiougou, daughter of Sam and Eva, helped me with the translations from Greece to English of many of our family surnames. Thank you Anna, someday I promise you I will learn Greek!

I also want to thank Roula (Ballas) Diaz from Australia. She is the daughter of Theodoros' son, Jim. Roula provided many important details about the Australian family for both the story and the family tree. Without your help Roula, I would have had to fly to Australia to interview everyone. (Perhaps I'll come visit before I write the next edition!)

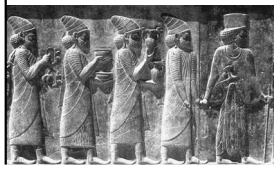
Cousin Gus from Santa Barbara dug out some old photos of his father and mother on the farm in Antigo, Wisconsin. The photos and the background information he provided added a real richness and authenticity to the whole story. Thanks, Gus.

And, thank you God, for making me a Ballas!

THE BALLAS TIMELINE

1500 B.C.

Phoenicians from North Africa establish trade routes through out the Mediterranean and coastline of Greece



813 B.C.



Carthage become a free state and strengthens foothold on Greek islands and coastlines



Birth of Christ

Greece falls under Turkish Rule

800 B.C. | 1 A.D. | 1299 | 1350

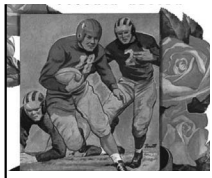
Carthaginians land in Greece on the Peloponnesus. The Ballas Ancestor with a Tail accepts challenge of The Giant and defeats him

Rise of the Ottoman Empire





Greek War of Independence



First Rose Bowl Football game, Pasadena, California

1400 — 1821 — 1901 — 1902

The Big Bala, Georgius Kelaris, guerilla fighter and folk hero, caught and beheaded by the Turks

Australia becomes a Commonwealth





Titanic sinks in North Atlantic Ocean

Five more Ballas brothers immigrate to America from Greece.

1904 — 1904-08 — 1906 — 1912

Demetrius and son, John, enter America through Ellis Island

Great Earthquake, San Francisco





Prohibition of Alcohol with passage of the 18th Amendment

John and Lucy go into bootlegging business

James J. Ballas born, 1st grandson of Demetrius

1914 — 1915 — 1917 — 1919

Old Demetrius returns to Greece

The Ballas brothers' work on the railroad takes them from Chicago to Savanna, Illinois

Beginning of World War I



Ballas Boys purchase 480 acre farm in Wisconsin.



World War II begins with Germany's invasion of Poland

After 22 years of struggle the Ballas boys sell their original farm to the U.S. Gov't

Stock market crash triggers Great Depression

1922 1929 1931 1939

Bill Ballas' fiancée, Christina, arrives from Greece

Empire State Building completed, New York City



1915 through 1952, Fifteen grandchildren of Demetrius born in America, sixteen born in Greece

1941

Japan invades Pearl Harbor



1942

Hitler's army invades the Balkans and occupies the Ballas' home town of Kiato, Greece

1945

The 1st great-grandson of Demetrius born, John J. Ballas, assuring the family name will survive into the next generation

World War II ends with V-E and V-J Days

1950



Korean War begins



Berlin Wall built

Jimmy and Harry, become the last of the Ballas' to immigrate to Australia

Bill and Con, sons of Christos, immigrate to Australia

1954

1955

1956

1961

Louie, son of Theodoros, migrates from Greece to Australia

Elvis Presley hits the music scene on the Ed Sullivan show.



Helen joins her brother, Louie, in Australia, more siblings follow

Summer Olympics Melbourne Australia



1962

Junior Ballas moves to California

Soviets put first man in space

1963

John F. Kennedy, 30th President of the United States is Assasinated

Gus Ballas, son of Bill, leaves Wisconsin for California

Tom Ballas starts to build his Empire in California

1964

James J. Ballas (Jimmy) dies at 48 years old

Beatles cross the pond and become big hit in U.S.



1965



U.S. sends troops to Vietnam



Australian Prime Minister disappears under strange circumstances

Nephews of Tom and Junior move to California and work for the uncles

1966

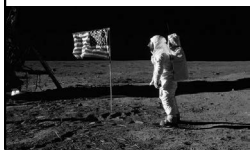
John Demetrius Ballas, oldest son of Demetrius, passes away

1967

1969

"Big Jim" first from America to visit Kiato, and his great uncles

Neil Armstrong becomes first man to set foot on the moon



1970

1972

Terrorist attacks at Munich Olympics



1973

Uncle Louie passes away in Savanna, Il.

Bill Ballas dies in California under the loving care of his son, Gus

1974

Louie and Sam begin their move back to Greece

1977

The Amazing Stories of Christos Ballas are told

1979

Margaret Thatcher become first woman Prime Minister of England



1980

Theodoros, youngest son of Demetrius, dies in his homeland of Greece

1982

Uncle Tom dies in a fiery crash of his helicopter

1989

Bill Ballas, son of Christos, fulfills his promise and builds a new home in Kiato



Channel Tunnel between England and France opens

September 11 (9-11), Terrorists hijack four jet liners. Destroy Twin Towers, damage Pentagon and crash plane in Pennsylvania, almost 3,000 people died in the attacks

Uncle Junior loses his battle with cancer

1991 1994 1999 2001

Collapse of the Soviet Union and end of Cold war



Europe merges all currency and adopts the Euro



1998 to 2011 Cousins Connect: Liz comes from Australia to the U.S., Lisa visits “Down Under”, Jennette goes to Australia and Greece, and Elizabeth includes Greece her European tour. “The sons of Big Jim” march on Greece: Jimmy, Christopher and Nicholas

2003

Lucas John Demogines born. Great, great, great, grandson to Demetrius

2012

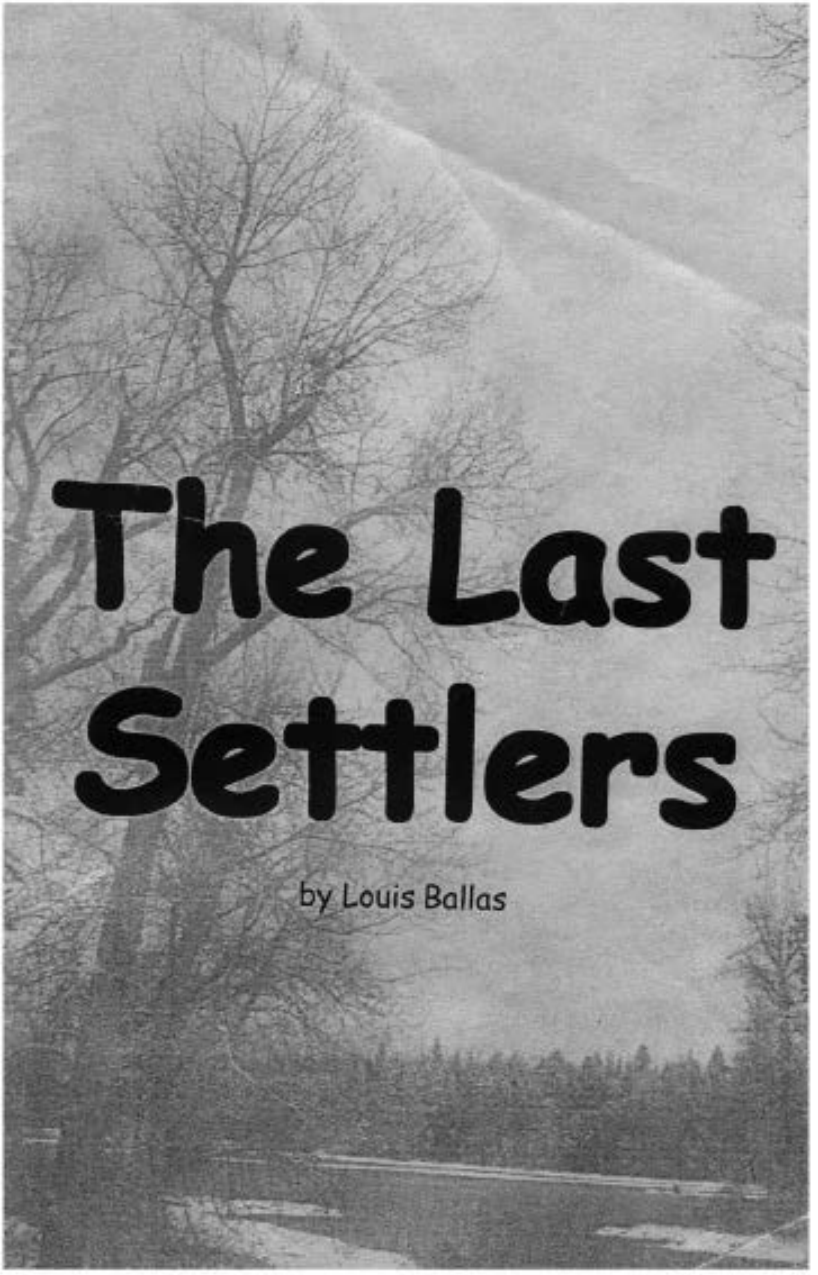
Gus, J.D. and Angela, and Jeff meet up in Greece, details of the Ballas Story articulate

2013

The Ballas Story is published and TheBallasStory.com website is launched

Appendix

The Last Settlers


The Last Settlers
by Louis Ballas

This is a story of a man and his five sons. The events told here happened some time ago, when America was young, and its' gates were wide open to immigrants from most of the civilized world. They came to make their homes and share the wealth in the country of boundless opportunity.

Back in the year 1905, James Ballas and his son John (who was fourteen years old at the time) came to America and settled in Chicago with the hope of finding work. Through an employment agency, they shipped out on an "extra" gang on the railroad. They worked the railroad for a while together, and in a years time the "old man" sent word for another son to come and join them in America.

As time went by, year after year, the "old man" had brought more sons to the new country and they all worked on the railroad, from place to place, making their home in box cars. Some time later, John and Bill went to night school to learn English and after a while, they began to understand the language fairly well.

In 1914 they were all working for the railroad on the "extra" gang, and in the fall of that year, they were laid off. The Road Master went to see the "old man" and his sons to tell them that before he left, he had found them a job for the winter in the Savannah-Illinois yards. The boys were very good workers, and the Road Master promoted John (the oldest son) to the position of Foreman and the second son to Assistant Foreman in the Savannah yards (which was a fifty yard). So they moved their camp and settled on the side of the yard and took care of it. They worked through the winter and in the spring of that year, after all the boys were settled and were secure in their jobs, the "old man" decided to go back to his home.

One Sunday afternoon, after the "old man" had a nice dinner, the boys came in and as they were sharing stories,

the father said, "My boys, we all came to this country when we were young, and now that you have grown up and most of you are men, you realize the responsibility I have back home. I must depart from you and go back and take care of your mother and your two brothers. I realize that my home is split - half here, and half over there, but you boys know what you are doing and I must go back and take care of those I have left behind. Now that you are all here together, I hope you will always stay together. You have in front of you a great country. Opportunities and everything a man could want have been laid before you. I want you all to remember that truth and honesty are the best insurance for your future. You're actions have proven your good work. We may never see each other again - that's the way the world is sometimes. I wish from the bottom of my heart that you boys make your home and be contented and happy with the things you have, and that every time you pick up dirt - it will turn to gold. You all have my blessing and tomorrow I will take the train and go back to your dear 'old mother.' One thing I want to say to Sam and Louis. I want you boys to give your checks each payday to Bill for one year. After that, you can keep your checks for yourselves. As you know, Bill, John, Pete and the two younger boys have always given me their checks and now that I'm going back, I want you two boys to help Bill out as he helped me before you came to this country."

The train was leaving the next morning at nine o'clock. The "old man" planned to take the No. 7 train; he also decided to take Bill with him as far as Chicago. All the boys went to the depot and bade he and Bill good-bye. After arriving in Chicago, they had to wait several hours at the Union Depot before making the connection to New York. While they were waiting, the old man said "Bill, I want you to take care of the younger boys in my place. You are the second oldest and I am leaving you with the responsibility of watching out for them, and taking good care of them. See that they are

doing well and don't forget to write so I know how you and the boys are coming along. I know you have good jobs in the yards and you must do your best to keep them. Listen to John, as he is the oldest, and some day, if you're ever prosperous enough to afford the trip, come to the old country and see us."

As Bill and the old man were talking, a young girl passed in front of them. Bill looked up at her, and the old man, noticing, patted Bill on the shoulder and said, "Don't worry, son - some day you'll get your wish. I know you're old enough to have someone like that, and one day you will find your partner. Let's hope that day will come soon." Tears came from the "old man's" eyes. Bill looked at him and said, "That's okay, Dad. All things come in good time. I just hope we will be together again soon." Soon it came time to leave. Bill helped the "old man" up from his seat, saying "There's your train." They walked to the train together, the "old man" boarded and said to Bill, "This is the last kiss and good-bye," and a few moments later, the train pulled out. Bill took the No. 11 back to Savannah, and joined the rest of the boys back in camp.

The following day, they went on with their work. John told Bill to take yard "A" and he told Pete to take charge of yard "C". He instructed Louis, the youngest of the brothers, to stay in the car and do the cooking. "While we had the 'old man'," he said, "he did the cooking for us. You're the youngest, so you can take care of that job." The boys all seemed contented and did their work so well that the Yard Master was extremely pleased with them.

The next few months were uneventful, until one day, a fellow, named Tony, who was working for John as a section hand said to him, "John, why don't you settle down and get married?" "I don't know." John replied, "I can't find a girl around here, and it's hard for me to think of getting married while I have my brothers to look after."

Tony said, "You don't have to worry about your brothers any more. They're all big enough to take care of themselves. I'll tell you what to do. You come with me next Sunday to Chicago; I have a very good friend there who has a nice young daughter. I'd like to have you two get acquainted with her and see what you think about her.

John said "Alright, we have passes anyway, so it won't cost us anything. We'll go next Sunday. On Sunday, they took the Number 7 and when they arrived in Chicago, they went directly to the home of Tony's friend. Tony introduced John to his friend, who was also named Tony. Young Tony said to his friend, "This boy is from Savannah, where he is a yard foreman. He has four more brothers, and I think he's old enough to settle down. I understand your daughter Lucy is getting to the age where she might consider marriage, and I thought it would be a good idea if John and Lucy were to get married." The older Tony said "Yes, I agree. I think it would be a good idea."

While dinner was being prepared, they relaxed and talked, and after a while, Lucy entered the room. John looked at Lucy, and she looked at John. She didn't know at the time why they were there, or the plans the they had for her. After dinner was finished, they had a few glasses of wine and then young Tony said to John, "Well, we had better be going back." "We'll see you next Sunday" he told his friend. The old man bid them good-bye and added that he looked forward to seeing them the following Sunday. Young Tony and John then left for the return trip to Savannah.

The following Sunday, Tony and John returned to Chicago to see the older Tony and talk things over. The old man told them that he would travel to Savannah to visit John and the rest of the brothers, and that he would bring Lucy along, and in the middle of the following week, Tony, his

wife and daughter Lucy made their way to Savannah and went to the box cars to see John, Bill, Pete, Sam and Louis. The old man remarked "You sure have a lot of brothers! They're all husky and everything looks pretty good." At the same time, all the boys were looking over Lucy, and every one of them was satisfied as she was pretty, young, and very nice. When John asked them if they liked her, they all agreed that she would make John a good wife. With the encouragement of his brothers, John asked Tony for his consent to marry his daughter. Tony said, "You bet, Johnny, you can marry my daughter, but I want you to get a house and live in town, because a box car isn't the place for a woman to live." John agreed, and in a few days he and Lucy found a house, bought some furniture, and set a wedding date. The wedding was to be held in Chicago.

A week later, all the boys dressed up and made the trip to Chicago to attend John's wedding. After John and Lucy were married, the boys spent many a Sunday visiting them at their home.

For about three years, the boys went about their daily routine. John's father-in-law (Tony) came to Savannah to start a grocery store and asked John to quit his job as yard foreman and go into business with him. He explained that John could earn a better living and would have a much brighter future by doing so. John took the old man up on the offer and together, they started the business. John had a little money set aside that he invested in the store, and he told Bill (the second brother) that he would see the Yard Master and try to get him to give Bill the job as yard foreman. Bill refused however; he figured it was too much responsibility for him, so the Yard Master had to find someone else to take John's place.

Some time after the newJforeman came, Pete decided to quit his job. He too wanted to go to Chicago and go into business for himself. Bill told him, "Pete, don't quit your job. We were all raised in the outside world and it will be pretty hard for you to get used to an inside job. In the first place, you don't know much about business, and you're liable to loose the little money you've saved." Pete didn't listen however; he found a partner and together they went into the restaurant business.

With John and Pete gone, the only ones left back at the camp were Bill, Sam and Louis. They stuck to their jobs for quite a while, and every so often they took the train to Chicago to see Pete. One day, they got a letter from Pete's partner, advising them that Pete was very sick and that one of the boys should come to Chicago to look after him. The following day, all three brothers made the trip to see Pete. Pete asked Sam to move to Chicago and stand in for him in the business. Sam agreed, quit his job, and went on working for Pete.

One day, Bill and Louis traveled to Chicago to see how Pete and Sam were getting along. At the dinner table, Bill said, "Sam, how do you like it here?" Sam replied that he didn't like it, that he couldn't get used to being inside, and that there seemed to be no let up in the work. It was twenty four hours of work every day and he was disgusted at the way things were going.

While this conversation was going on, Louis had picked up a newspaper and while reading an advertisement caught his eye. It read, "Farms For Sale in Northern Wisconsin and cut over lands. Make your home in Wisconsin — the land of milk and honey. See the employment agency at LaSalle Street in downtown Chicago." He showed the ad to Bill and suggested that they immediately look into it. Louis said "I know you have always liked the farm, and so do I, so let's go

to this agency right away and check this out." Bill agreed, and together they went to the 14th floor of the building where the employment agency was located. They walked into the office and explained that they had seen the ad in the paper and that they would like to buy the land and make their home in Wisconsin.

The man at the agency was pleased with the boys enthusiasm and told them he thought they had a good idea. He went on to explain that the agency had a representative in Merrill, Wisconsin who would show them around to the various land sites and let them pick out the one they liked the best.

The youngest brother was excited and ready to start immediately. Bill said that they would make the trip the following night and they would take Sam along. They called the train station and made reservations for the trip. The ticket agent asked if the boys would like to sleep on the train. Louis said he had never slept on a train and because it was going to be an all night trip, they decided that they would take a berth. The agent advised them that if they took the 8:00pm train, they would arrive in Merrill at nine o'clock the next morning. The land agent told them that when they arrived, they were to stop at "Brown's Land Agency," where they would be taken care of because he would call ahead that the boys would be coming. Bill said that that would be fine and they would leave the following night. The agent bade them good-bye and good luck. The boys left the office and took a street car back to the restaurant. There, they talked their plans over and Sam, as well as the rest, was anxious to take the trip to Northern Wisconsin.

The following evening, as planned, Bill, Sam and Louis went to the Union Depot and took the eight o'clock train heading North. They arrived at Merrill about 9:30 the next

morning. They got off the train, looked around the depot, and started walking toward town. Bill said, "This is a beautiful town. They sure have a lot of Evergreens and they sure are pretty." They walked along and soon came to the center of the town. Bill said that it was about time they inquired as to where they could find Brown's Land Agency. A fellow happened to walk by them and Bill stopped him and asked if he could direct them to Brown's Land Agency. The man pointed and said "Right there, next to the bank." Bill thanked him and they walked over to the office and all went in. A gentleman (Mr. Brown) got up from his desk and greeted them as they entered. He had a pleasant smile for them and asked if they were the boys from Chicago. Bill said, "Yes, we just came up."

"Well," Mr. Brown replied, "I am glad to see you boys. I suppose you are going to say here for a few days." The boys said that they were in fact going to stay a little while because it would be like a vacation. Mr. Brown put his coat on and said that if the boys would follow him he would take them across the street to the Lincoln hotel — "a very nice place." He told them to leave their suitcases at the hotel as they would go to dinner after they registered. They walked over to the hotel, registered and then had dinner with Mr. Brown — which they enjoyed very much.

After dinner, they walked around town and looked things over. Mr. Brown said, "I suppose you boys are anxious to look over the land around the country. It's getting sort of late to do that today, so we can start tomorrow morning. We'll show you boys the different land sites and you can pick out the spot you like the best."
The boys said it would be okay with them if they started in the morning and Mr. Brown, explaining that he had work to do back at the office, said he was looking forward to seeing the boys the following day. He excused himself and told the boys to have a good time. "You bet we will," said

the boys, and they walked about the town, getting acquainted with the town, and after a while, they went back to the hotel to retire.

After they awakened the following morning, Bill remarked "Boy, it's nice to sleep up here - nice and cool - it sure isn't like Chicago. There, it's so hot, it's impossible to sleep." Louis added, "It's awfully hot around Chicago at this time of year (June), but it sure is nice and cool up here. Boy this is the country to live in!"

They had breakfast and went to Mr. Brown's office. Mr. Brown asked if they were ready to look at land and they said they were. They got into Mr. Brown's car and drove out along a road that Mr. Brown explained used to be called "Grandfather's Road." They drove on this road for eight or nine miles, after which Mr. Brown stopped the car and told the boys about a track of land they could purchase at a cheap price, "But," he saic, "there are quite a few rocks on the land." They looked things over, saw that there was quite a bit of timber they could harvest to make some extra money, in addition to the profits they would make from the farm. They decided against that particular piece of land however, because of all the rocks.

They drove on, taking a different road and finally stopped at another spot where Mr. Brown said, "There is some land for you boys. It has good timber on it, and if you boys decide to take it, I know you will come out fine." Bill asked how much land there was in the track, to which Mr. Brown replied "There's about 120 acres here, and it sells for about $50 an acre."

Bill discussed it with Sam and Louis, saying "I don't think we want to buy this. There won't be enough land for all of us, and it's too expensive. Besides, we don't know anything about timber. We'd better go along and have him show us a different place."

They told Mr. Brown that they were not interested in that particular piece of land. Mr. Brown replied that they had a lot of land around, and so he took them to another area. Around dinner time, Mr. Brown asked if the boys would like to have a little venison. The boys laughed and Mr. Brown said, "We'll go up to this place and then we'll get some to eat."

They drove two or three miles further and came to a place by the name of Bunker Hill. In this place there was a general store and a sort of larding for logs, ties, and there were a few lumberjacks that stayed there. Mr. Brown took the boys inside the general store and told the man to fix up food enough for four men. They had dinner and everything seemed to taste very good. After dinner, Mr. Brown took the brothers to look at yet another piece of land. When they arrived, he said "Here is a farm for you boys. There's a house and 160 acres; about fifteen acres are clear and ready to start farming. The boys looked around the farm and the house and decided they didn't like it. They said that in the near future, it still wouldn't be enough for all of them. They said that what they wanted was a really big place. Mr. Brown said that he had one more place for them to look at, but that it was too far for them to go look at right then. "We'll go there tomorrow and see what you boys think about it." he said, and they drove back to town.

The next morning the boys went over to Mr. Brown's office where they found him waiting for them. They got into his car and they headed out on highway 64. The gravel road was long and hilly. Bill remarked "This looks pretty hard for farming because of all the hills and rocks, wouldn't you agree, Mr. Brown?" Mr. Brown replied, "Yes, it is hilly, but there are some good dairy farms along this road; it's good land."

As the boys were looking around the countryside, they notice several farms with lots of dairy cows and everything looked beautiful to them. They had their hearts set on just that kind of farm.

They traveled along about 15 miles out of Merrill on the same road. As they were getting close to the other farm the road became narrower, almost like a logging road, for about two miles. As they got closer, Mr. Brown told them that about forty feet away there was a railroad track. They stopped, the boys got out of the car and walked around - soon finding themselves standing next to the railroad track.

Bill said, "Oh boy, I feel at home now. There's a railroad track in these woods." He asked Mr. Brown whose railroad it was and Mr. Brown told him it was the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad. Then they called it the Hinniman Branch. He told them that a train passed by at least two times a week, and in fact, while they were talking, they heard a whistle blow from far off in the woods. Shortly after, a small engine came puffing, at about ten miles an hour, pulling three or four flat cars that were loaded with logs. There was a passenger car at the end of the flat cars. As the train approached the engineer highballed and the conductor, sitting on his chair in the middle of the door, waved to them as the train passed by. The boys were glad to see such a train as they were accustomed to the fast trains back home.

Bill commented, "This is beautiful. Everything around looks so clean and so nice." All the boys were enthusiastic and Bill asked Mr. Brown if he owned the land around there. As they walked a little further, they saw a small frame building with the word "Bannister" on it. Bill asked Mr. Brown what that building was... Mr. Brown replied that it was a depot. "That's where the train sometimes unloads a few things for the farmers and lumberjacks. Do you see that

by the side tracks?, he asked. "That's where they load wood, logs, posts, and various other things."

Bill asked, "How is the land around here?", to which Mr. Brown replied, "The land is good, and easy to clean. This land was burned by a fire a few years ago and it was logged about forty years ago. That's what you call "cut over" land. I think you boys could make quick farms out of this place." he said.

The boys asked Mr. Brown how many acres were in the piece of land and he told them they could buy all they wanted with the exception of the land next to the railroad tracks which was owned by another fellow. The boys said they wanted to buy everything around the railroad and asked if there was any way to buy the land by the tracks. Mr. Brown said he guessed they could buy the man out; his name was Columbus and he had a log house not very far from the land they were looking at. The boys decided to go and talk with him at once.

When they got to his house, they found Mr. Columbus outside the house, sawing wood by hand. Mr. Brown and he had quite a talk, after which Mr. Columbus agreed to sell. Mr. Brown explained that there were about 120 acres that they could buy from Mr. Columbus and that they could buy all the more land he wanted. He told the brothers that in that part of the country it was common to buy land in 40's or 80's.

Bill, Sam and Louis talked things over and started walking to explore some of the land. The boys decided to buy enough land for all of them. They wanted all the land around this particular place and they asked Mr. Brown how many acres that could be. Mr. Brown said, "If you buy both sides of the road and also buy this fellow out, that will be about 480 acres. Bill told him that that would be okay. "That

isn't any too much land for four farmers and someday, there might be more, so it's always best to have plenty of land."

Bill asked how far the long road came through. Mr. Brown said, "Well, that's the end of the road, but there's a road coming from the other direction. They're building a road from Antigo... that's about fourteen miles from here and they're going to meet with this road from Merrill. You boys will have a good road to Merrill or Antigo, and in time, I believe it's going to be a state road. The boys were glad to hear that and as they walked around, Louis commented, "Why this is nothing to clean. We can easily clean this land up in no time." They took one more look around and decided that they were all well satisfied with how things were going and that they would go back to town and discuss the price.

When they got to the office, Bill asked Mr. Brown "How much will it take to buy the 480 acres?" Mr. Brown said, "Some of the land comes to about fifteen dollars an acre, some twenty dollars an acre and some will be thirty-five dollars an acre. In addition, the land that Columbus has will sell for about fifty an acre." Bill asked what the total cost of the land would come to and after some calculating, Mr. Brown told them it would all come to about $10,300. The boys looked at one another; Bill asked, "What do you think? Should we buy it?"

Louis and Sam both agreed that they'd like to buy it, but "we don't have enough money to pay cash for it." Bill said, "We have John. He'll help us. We can call him long distance, tell him we want to buy the land up here and get his opinion about the whole thing." Sam and Louis agreed that that would be fine and that Bill should go ahead and call him.
The boys told Mr. Brown that they would be back later. They told him they were going to call their brother in Savannah, Illinois and they left and made the call to John.

Bill explained everything to him and John said, "Whatever you boys do is okay with me." Bill told him that they would see him in a day or two because they were coming to Savannah. They then went back to Mr. Brown's office and advised him that they'd decided to buy the land.

Mr. Brown told them that if they would give him a small deposit, he would make the order legal. Bill replied, "We'll give you $300 and we'll pay the rest when we move up here." Mr. Brown told them that would be okay. The boys told him they were leaving for Chicago and they expected to be back in a week or so. They asked Mr. Brown if he could arrange to have Mr. Columbus move so that they could move in as soon as they got back. Mr. Brown assured them that everything would be settled, including the deeds, abstracts, and everything else so that when the boys got back, they'd be all set to take immediate possession of the land. They bade Mr. Brown good-bye and that same night, they took the train back to Chicago.

They went to the restaurant to see their brother, Pete, and then took a train to Savcnnah to talk over the events with John. When they got to Savannah, Bill told John, "We have some nice land in Wisconsin and it's a beautiful country! I think we made a good buy. As you know, around here in Illinois, the land is pretty high. We got pretty cheap land, and enough of it for all of us." John said "That's fine, how much money do you need?" The boys had about $7,000 and John told them "We'll put up the other $3,000 and you can go ahead and pay cash for it. I know you won't have any money left to work on, but it's best to pay for the land up front. Then you'll kncw it's yours."

John's wife spoke up. She said, "I don't think the boys should buy a farm up there in the woods. In the first place, they have never farmed in their lives - they don't know how. If you want to go along with them, you can help them

buy this land, but I won't approve of my moving up there." John said, "Well, that's okcy. Someday, we might go further ourselves. You can never tell."

The next day they all went to Chicago to see Pete. They talked with Pete and he was just as interested in the farm as the rest of the boys. He decided to sell his share of the restaurant to his partner and go with the boys.

A few days later they all went back to Savannah and went to John's house to talk everything over with him. A day later the boys went to the bank and drew their money out. They stayed in Savannah a few more days and then decided that they had better head back to Wisconsin. John told them "I have a car, an old Overland. You boys can have this car to take along with you; you can start your trip in the morning."

That evening the boys made all the necessary arrangements, packed up the few clothes they had and then the next morning they began their trip back to Wisconsin. In those days the roads were pretty rugged - mostly dirt, sand, gravel - so it took them two days time to complete the trip which was only about 100 miles. They had a lot of fun on the way however. They passed through the Indian reservation, Shannon, and later to Antigo. They stopped at Antigo and got something to eat at a local restaurant. They had planned to go west on route 64, but a fellow told them that the road had just been completed and he didn't know if the boys could go to Merrill. He said the road hadn't been opened, but that they figured on opening it in a week or so. The boys told this fellow that they lived west, about fourteen miles and that road happened to be the only one that would take them there.
After they had bought a few supplies, the boys got into their Overland and headed west on route 64. After they'd driven about four or five miles, they came upon a road crew.

A fellow in the middle of the road flagged them down and told them they couldn't go through. Bill said, "We bought some land up here and I understand this is the only road that will get us to our land. The man asked how far they were going and Bill told him they were going as far as it took to hit the railroad track. The fellow said it would be okay if they went through. The road had just been graded and the boys' car was the first car that had ever traveled on that road. They drove until they came pretty near to Vansper, parked the car by the side of the road and got out. Bill said, "Boy, am I glad we got here. At last... we are home!"

From where they parked, they walked over to Mr. Columbus' log house. Mr. Columbus, his wife and two little children were there. They were glad to see the boys. Bill said, "We are the boys who bought all this land." Columbus replied, "Yes, I know all about it. You boys can have this log house. Tomorrow morning I'm moving out and if you boys care to, you can stay here tonight."

The boys said that they would drive back to Merrill, as they thought the log house wouldn't be large enough to accommodate all of them - it had but one room. They said they would come back in the morning. Before leaving, they asked Mr. Columbus about the land. He told them, "It's good land. It's easy to clean; some is a little wet, but after you clear it, I think it will dry up. You boys will make a quick farm." Bill asked him how long he had been there and Columbus replied that he had only been there for three months - since the spring. Bill said, "We'll see you in the morning.", but before they were able to leave, Mr. Columbus asked him if he warted to buy his miscellaneous property.

"I have two horses, a wagon and a cow. I also have a little pile of hay which is known as 'bluejoint' stacked back of the

house." Bill told him they would come back in the morning and tell him then what they had decided. Then they left for Merrill.

When they got to Merrill they went directly to Mr. Brown's office... he was glad to see them. He asked if they planned on moving on the place. Bill said, "Yes, we went down and asked Columbus and he said he was going to move in the morning. We'll pay for the land in cash tomorrow since the banks are closed now and we can't cash any checks." The boys went over to the hotel for the night.

The next day they went over to Mr. Brown's office and from there they went to the bank. Mr. Brown had all the deeds, abstracts, and the title for the land ready. Bill gave Mr. Brown a check for $10,000 and Mr. Brown gave them the abstract. Bill asked him if he had all of their names on it and Mr. Brown said all of the names, John, Bill, Pete, Sam and Louis were on the title. He told them that the land now belonged to them, and he wished them good luck.

With the transaction completed with Mr. Brown, they bought some groceries and drove out to the land where Mr. Columbus was waiting for them. He was all packed and ready to move out. Louis said to Bill, "We had better buy those two horses, the cow and wagon. He has a light sleigh too. We'll need it after a while." Bill agreed. He said, "We only have a couple hundred dollars left; that's not very much." They asked Mr. Columbus how much he wanted for everything. He replied, "You can have the team pretty cheap. One horse is blind and the other is old, but they're good workers. They're good enough for you boys to start out with, and I'll throw in the harness for $50." Bill said "OK," and they bought the wagon for $15, the cow for $30, and the sleigh for $5. Altogether, everything cost them $100. Mr. Columbus said they could have the old crosscut saw. Louis asked what it was used for.

"To saw wood." he told him.
"What kind of wood?" asked Louis.
"Wood to burn in your stove." Mr. Columbus answered.

The boys paid Mr. Columbus and at last they felt that their life of farming had really begun. The boys looked around the house. On the side of the house there was an addition for the team and the cow. There was a door from the log house where they could look into the stock room, where they kept the animals. Bill told Louis, "You're the youngest, you can milk the cow. That way, you'll be learning something about farming."

The log house was one large room. Mr. Columbus had left one bed and Bill and Sam suggested that they get a couple more beds and also give the house a nice white wash. The next day, Louis drove to Antigo - he was the handiest with the car. Bill went along and in Antigo they bought three beds, some white sheets, a couple pillows, bacon, beans, flour, and some other groceries. Then they headed back to the property. When they got home, Pete and Sam were sawing wood with the old saw. Sam said, "We've been sawing all afternoon and we've only got six pieces of wood cut. Boy, this is hard work!"

Louis took the flour, bacon, beans, etc. into the house. Sam said, "I bet you forgot some tobacco." "Yes, we sure did" replied Louis, "but don't worry, we'll go to town tomorrow to get things lined up. We'll buy some tobacco then."

They took the beds off the car and put them in the log house, placing one bed in each corner, with the old cook stove that Columbus had left for them in the middle of the room.

There were two windows in the house and they covered them with some curtains. They fixed up their beds, and

decided that everything looked good. That evening, they made their supper from the bacon, beans and bread they had bought in town.

Bill said, "So this is the farm. It won't be so bad if we start cutting some of this brush outside and cut some of the stumps out so we can see a little ways." The boys talked about the farm and their plans for it until it started to get dark, and it was then that they realized they didn't have a lamp. They decided that the only thing to do was to go to sleep.

After they had been in bed about an hour, they could hear the horse eating, and he seemed to go on and on. Bill said to Sam, "What did you feed that horse?" Sam told him that there had been a little feed that Columbus had left, but that he had given it to the horse nearly two hours earlier and he couldn't have been eating all that time. Bill said, "I can hear him yet." The boys got up, and Bill, whose bed was right next to the logs they had cut earlier, noticed that the horse had been eating on one of the logs.

"Look at that," said Sam. "He has almost half of the log ate up. I wonder what's wrong?"

Louis said, "I bet he's just hungry." Maybe he didn't get enough to eat."

They gave the horse a bucketful of grain from the sack and part of a bail of hay. After he had this, he was fine. Bill said, "So that was what was wrong with him. He was hungry." Again, the boys retired to their beds for the rest of the night.

In the morning, they got up, made breakfast, and after breakfast, Bill said, "Louis, you stay and wash the dishes and clean up the place. We also have to bake some bread."

Louis said, "I don't know how to bake bread." Sam said he'd do it, he said he'd mix the flour and make the dough. Bill said, "Alright, the rest of us will get out and start to cut some of this brush and clean up around here so we can see out to the road."

They started clearing the brush and a stump that was close to the log house. Bill said that it would be better if they had that stump out, so they went to get the team. They took one horse out and had a difficult time getting the blind one out. It took a while, but they finally got him outside. Pete held the horses and Bill went in to get the harness. None of the boys knew how to put the harness on. They put the collars on, then struggled to get the harness on. After they finally got it on, they tried to drive the team, but the lines pulled together, which just drew the horses up against one another. Bill said, "That doesn't work." They then took the lines apart, put them on again, and once more tried to drive the team. This time, each horse was pulling toward the outside. Again, they took the harness off, and again they started all over.

While all this was going on, a fellow happened to walk in. He walked up to the boys and said, "Hello, are you the boys who bought lots of land up here?" Bill said that they were, and the man said "Well, I'm your neighbor. My name is Al Smith. I live about two miles from here. I just brought a load of wood to the landing."

Bill said, "I'm very glad to know you. Right now we're having quite a job here trying to harness up this team."

"Maybe I'll be able to help you." said Al. "In the first place, you have the collar on upside down and you have your lines all wrong. I'll fix that up." He put the harness on the proper way, and when he was finishec, he asked "How much land do you own?"

Bill replied, "Oh, quite a bit. We own almost this whole section."

What are you boys going to do with all of this land?" Mr. Smith asked.

"We're going to make farms." replied Bill.

"Did you pay for this land?"
"Yes."

"I'm sorry I didn't know you boys before. But I know how it is. Those real estate fellows never give you a chance to walk around and find out for yourself."
"Why, what's wrong with this land?" asked Bill.
Mr. Smith replied, "You boys bought all swamp. Around this time of year, in August, it's quite dry up here. But the rest of the year it's mostly all wet. It's pretty hard to farm on wet land. I don't want to discourage you boys, but you'll find out for yourselves."

"Well," Bill said, "I don't know. After we clear it up, it'll dry up. I think it will be pretty good."

Mr. Smith said, "I have to go and unload my load and I'll see you boys again. I understand you boys bought the land in here and anyone who unloads cars of wood has to pay a dollar a car for the use of the land. Now you boys want to collect that as long as you are the owners." Bill thanked him, and Mr. Smith left.

After he had gone, the boys started working on pulling out the stump that was in their way. They had a piece of a chain and a hook around the stump, and then the whipple tree broke. They fixed that up, and then got some wire and hooked up the stump again. Bill and the rest of the boys started to dig around the roots, and they finally were

able to pry the stump out. Bill said, "It's almost dinner time. Let's feed the horses. We might as well take the harness off. I don't believe we'll use them this afternoon."

They all went to dinner and left the horses out in the brush so they could eat some of the green grass. When they got in the house, Bill asked Sam how the bread was coming along. Sam replied, "I mixed it the same as I always did, but it didn't come out at all... it didn't rise. I've a couple loaves in the oven. We can eat them." Sam took them out and they looked like pie cakes. Bill asked Sam, "Where did you learn to bake bread? You need yecst. Don't you remember how the old lady used to bake at home. She used to save a little bit of dough for the next time."

Sam said, "Don't worry. I'm going to save a little piece of this and make better bread next time." They got the bread out of the oven and started to eat it. Louis had some beans, a few potatoes... so far, so good. Louis said to Bill, "We have to go to town and get supplies so we have something to cook." Bill said, "Well, we'll get along fine today. We'll go tomorrow."

After dinner they went out to chop some more brush and Bill said, "After we clear this little spot, we ought to build a garage for the car." The boys went to the landing and picked up a few logs and there was a bit of old lumber laying around. They planned on going to town the next day to get some nails and other supplies they would need to build the garage.

Night came, and Sam prepared supper again. Louis milked the cow, and they had coffee with their light lunch. After they had finished eating, they started talking about how they were going to make a living... where was the income going to come from?

Bill said, "This is dairy country. We ought to get a few more cows and start to sell milk." The boys agreed that they should get some more cows so they could get enough income to keep them going. Before they retired for the night, they took the team and put them in the barn. Bill said, "Louis, don't feed those horses very much. They aren't going to do anything tomorrow."

After everything was said and done, they went to bed, and in a little while they heard the same horse they'd heard the previous night. He was eating up the mangers and Bill and Sam got up and looked at the horse. He had all his box almost eaten up and they agreed that something must be wrong with the horse.

"Yeah," said Sam, "I think there's something wrong alright. What do you suppose he's got? Well, that is what we get for buying cheap horses." The horse kept this up nearly the entire night.

The next morning, after breakfast, they were getting ready to go to town with the car when an old man appeared. His name was Belldo; he lived about four miles in the woods and had been around those parts for about fifty years. He walked with a cane and as he cpproached the boys, he said, "You boys bought some land here, didn't you?"
"Yes, lots of it."
"I live back here in the woods. I have a cabin there and I live all alone. I logged this and about thirty-five years ago. What are you going to do with this land?"

Bill said, "We're going to clear this land and make farms."

"That's okay" he said, "but you boys can make a little money while you're clearing land."

"How?", asked Bill.

"Do you see those rotten logs that are laying around your land? You can cut them four feet long, split them, load them in a boxcar and ship them to the land company. You get three or four dollars a cord."

"Are you sure," asked Bill.

"Well," he said, "do you see that car in the landing? Come over and I'll show you."

All the boys walked up to the landing with him and they saw all the wood by the side of the landing. Some was loaded in the car.

The old man said, "Now you boys can make your living and clear land as you go along." They were very glad to hear that. They invited the old man into the cabin where they made some coffee and talkec for quite a while about the country. After a while, the old man left the boys' home and Louis said, "Boy, we don't have to worry any more. We'll make some money on this wood."

The next day they took the car and went to town where they bought an ax, saw, nails for the garage, and some groceries. Day by day, they were getting used to the place. They cleared more land and after a while they had cleared nearly five acres and had about two cords of kindling wood cut. They shipped it to the Mayville Land Company and they got $3.50 a cord for it. They had quite a few pine stumps they had yet to get out, so with the money they got for the wood, they bought some dynamite.

They started blasting the biggest stumps first. They tied the horses up to carry parts of the stumps, but that was hard work for the horses, so they put them aside and they pried around the stumps by hand. Bill said, "We can make all these stumps into kindling wood and ship it to the land

company." This they did. They cut up all of the stumps into three and four foot lengths. They were mostly all pine stumps and they took them to the landing and loaded them into the rail cars.

About a week later, they got a letter telling them they shouldn't ship any more of that kind of wood. The letter read "It's hard to handle, and all we can pay for is the freight." "But," the letter read, "we will allow you ten cords out of the whole two car loads." The boys had worked for the better part of three weeks for nothing. From that time on, they burned the stumps.

Time went by, and one morning they went out to get the team and found one horse dead. Bill said, "Better for him. He never would have pulled through the winter anyway. We have to get another horse though, in order to make up a team."

They took the dead horse, pulled it out to where they had a clearing and buried it in a big stump hole. The following day, they went into Merrill and went to see the horse dealer. After looking over what was available, they bought a horse for $35, and that was all the money they had. They walked the horse back to the farm.

This was the first winter the boys had lived in their new place. In November it started snowing and kept snowing for two or three days. The roads at this time were never opened to Merrill or Antigo. The boys decided to go to town with the team and sleigh. They travelled about a mile or so; it was pretty hard for the team to pull the sled, so they went back to the farm. Bill said, "We had better wait until the train comes. We'll go to Merrill and get our groceries and some hay and feed for the horses. We can get this shipped on the train tomorrow and we can walk back with the small things tonight.

The next day around noon, they took the train to Merrill and arrived about five in the evening. They bought hay, groceries, and everything they needed at an establishment by the name of Pettermans. Bill and Louis decided that it would be better if they stayed in Merrill that evening, as it was getting dark.

In the morning, they shipped what they needed to and went along with the train. When they got home, they unloaded the ton of hay and the groceries. Since the snow was getting deeper and deeper, and the wind was getting stronger, they all stayed in the log house. There wasn't much to do in the winter because there wasn't any timber to cut, and therefore, no work to do.

About a quarter of a mile from their place they had a neighbor. He was away most of the time, but he always came back for the winter. He had a wife and three or four children. One day he and his wife came to visit the boys. He introduced himself as Mcrtin Jensen, and while they were getting acquainted, his wife noticed Sam making some bread and remarked, "You boys don't have to make bread. I'll do it for you."

Bill said, "Oh, you don't have to. We don't like to bother you. Sam is getting pretty good at it." Louis said, "It'd be nice to have some good bread sometime. Why not let Mrs. Jensen bake us some bread."

Mrs. Jensen said if they furnished her with the flour, she would bake the bread for nothing. They took some flour over to her and she made some nice, big loaves. From that time on she made all the bread for the boys, and on Sundays, she would sometimes give them a cake.

As winter passed, and spring came near, the boys got tired of "Batching" it. Bill said, "I don't know how we can make a

farm here without a woman." Louis remarked, "One of us has got to get married. After all, there should be a woman on the farm to make a home."

"But where are you going to get a woman around here?" Bill asked. "We're strangers and there are very few neighbors around. Besides that, I don't know if a woman would stay here with all of us "coyotes."

When spring arrived, once again they started cutting the brush, pulling stumps, and clearing the land. All summer long, they kept on clearing the land. At that time the boys realized that it was hard work and each one began to come to the realization that it would take years to clear the land and make a farm. As they all grew older, a day came while they were cutting wood in the land when Louis suggested dividing up the land so that each one knew what they had. That way, they would not have any trouble later on and at the same time they would all be willing to help the one that got married first so he could have his farm as soon as possible.

Bill responded angrily, "You boys must have forgotten what the old man said before he left. He said we should stick together. Now you're anxious to divide up already and we've only been here a couple of years. Now it looks as if each one would like to go be by himself. You realize I'm the oldest and I put in most of the money to buy this land - for the good of all of us. A little hardship like this is changing your minds. If that's the way you want it, we'll divide it up, but remember, we have another brother, John. He has a part of this land and he has something to say about this. If you boys really want to have it this way, we'll go to town and call John. We'll see what he wants to do."

So they went to Antigo and placed a long-distance telephone call to John. Bill told him that the boys weren't

very much satisfied with the way things were going and they'd like to know what pcrt of the land they owned individually. John's reply was that the boys should go ahead and divide up the land. They could give him what was left over, he told them. He said that whatever the boys did was acceptable to him.

So the boys got busy and went to the Land Abstract Company where they had the land divided up, to the satisfaction of each one of them. It was recorded at the county seat of Langlade County in Antigo, Wisconsin.

After everything was done, the boys went back to the farm and started working to clear Bill's land. Everyone was glad to help him out as he was the oldest. They worked with him until the fall of the year.

Time went by, and one day, as they were talking about their state of affairs, Bill said, "We can never make a home and be contented unless we have a woman to take care of us." They all talked this over and Louis said, "Bill, you're the oldest. Why don't you get married? You come next to John to get married."

Bill replied, "It's pretty hard to get married around here. You can see that for yourselves. There's nobody around to get acquainted with, and if we go to town and pick up a girl, I doubt that she would ever stick with us, considering our circumstances."

Sam said, "Bill, why don't you write to the old country and have our father send a girl for you to marry. I'm pretty sure that would be the best for you, as well as the rest of us, and I know you can trust the old man. Whatever he sends you, I'm pretty certain will fulfill the purpose needed on this farm."

Bill considered this for a while. "Well," he said, "It's the only thing we can do - to send for a girl from the old country." Louis said, "Bill, wr te the old man a letter and explain to him how we're situcted and I'm pretty sure our dad will understand our proposition. I believe he'll do all he can to send you a nice wife. He understands you, as he does all of us, and I know we can't go wrong. Bill gave the whole thing considerable thought, and the next day he decided to go ahead and write to the old man. He wrote the following letter.

My Dear Dad,

As you know, we are on a farm now. I'm here with all of the boys and I think it's about time for me to get married. Around this part of the country it's hard to find a girl, so I want you to find a girl who is willing to come over to this country and become my wife. She should be satisfied with whatever she finds here on the farm. I don't want to promise anything. All I'll promise is that the minute she comes over here, I will marry her, give her a home and do the best I can. Now, understand, your judgment is far greater than ours. Understand just what we want. It's up to you to send a girl that will serve the purpose and a girl that is willing to take this opportunity to come to America and make it her home forever. I am closing, anxious to here from you as soon as you can answer.

Your loving son,

Bill

The rest of the boys thought the letter was pretty good, so Louis took it to the mail box, which was three miles away, and mailed it.

Time passed, and the boys continued clearing the land, as

usual, until the winter came again. Around November, they received a letter from the old man. It read...

Dear Son Bill,

I got your letter and I understand perfectly. I am getting busy right away. I'll find you a girl that looks like an American girl - just as nice and just as beautiful. I already have one in mind. All I want you to do is make out the proper papers so she can come directly to you without any trouble. You need to send me a ticket for her and the papers. That's all that is necessary on your part. The girl will be over sometime next summer.

Your loving Dad

When Bill got the letter, all the boys were excited and decided that they had better start building another log house since they all couldn't live in one house together. The boys started gathering logs. They found dry timber around the swamps, and they collected all the wood they could find. The snow was getting pretty deep though, and so they really couldn't do very much.

They decided that Pete, Louis, and Sam should go out to work for the winter. Bill stayed home to take care of his stock and horses. The other boys got jobs in Milwaukee - in the railroad freight houses. They worked about three or four months and saved about $300. In March, they went back to the farm and gave the money to Bill to send for the girl.

Bill got busy right away. He went into Antigo to see a lawyer named Avery. Bill told Mr. Avery what he was planning to do and that he wanted to bring a girl to America and marry her. He said he wanted Mr. Avery to draw up the necessary papers, which he did right away. Bill bought

the ticket for his future wife's passage and sent it, together with the papers to his father in the old country.

When Bill got back to the farm the boys were all together again. Spring was just around the corner, and they started to build the second log house. They didn't know very much about building a house, but they took a chance on it and it took them pretty near all summer. It was a nice, square log house. Louis built up the chimney and plastered the inside. He also plastered outside between the logs, which gave the house a very nice appearance. It had four rooms - a kitchen, dining room, and two bedrooms. They decided it looked fine.

One day, as they were finishing up work on the log house, Louis went to the mail box and brought back a letter. The letter was from the old man.

"Dear Bill," it said. "I got your letter and the ticket, and I got the girl. She's a nice girl; I had her in my home for almost three months and I know you'll be satisfied. She's leaving about July 15th. She will be there about the first part of August. I want you to accept her as your wife because I already engaged her and I gave her the engagement ring. That means that I took her as my daughter-in-law, and as your wife. When she comes over there, I expect you to fulfill the promise that I made to this girl. I took your place and you understand that what I did was follow your wishes. I know from the bottom of my heart that you won't disappoint me. Your loving father."

Louis said, "Look Bill, there's another letter in the same envelope. I guess this one is for us." It read, "Dear Boys (Pete, Sam and Louis), I am writing you this letter to make you understand that I am sending a girl over there for Bill. I understand that you all live together on the farm and I want you boys to respect her cnd do all you can to help Bill

and his wife. Stick by them ard help them. I hope you boys get along better than you ever did and I don't want to hear any complaints or anything that will cause hard feelings between you. You must obey Bill, your older brother, do the right thing, and get along the best you know how. I hope you all will have good farms and live happily. I will close with kisses from your mother. Your loving father."

"Well," said Bill, "I guess we're going to get a girl here after all. I hope she'll be satisfied with this log house."

Louis remarked, "Sure! Look at the nice plaster job and look at that chimney. Why, this is the nicest log house in Northern Wisconsin. It took us three months to build it."

The next day they finished with the log house and started digging a well. They dug it about thirty feet deep, made a box out of pine lumber and they bought a pump and put it near the log house. After the log house and pump was completed, they started clecring land, cutting wood, and blasting stumps again. They were more ambitious than ever, and sang while they worked, "She'll be coming 'round the mountain when she comes. She'll be driving six white horses when she comes." Everyone was happy. Sometimes, when they were cutting brush, they would find blueberries and branberries. They'd get their feet wet picking them, but they didn't seem to mind that.

They went along, waiting for the day when they would hear from the girl. They went to town and bought a bed, stove, curtains, a little furniture, and dressed up the log house. The painted the inside of the house, and it looked swell.

Bill said, "Boy, won't she be surprised! We have everything nice and clean, and I know she will be well satisfied when she sees it."

A few days later, a messenger came from Merrill, with a telegram. He asked if the Ballas brothers lived there. Bill took the telegram and paid the messenger. The telegram was sent from a steamship and it read as follows.

"Arriving in New York Thursday, August 2. Christina Janes"

Bill said, "Boys, she'll be in New York tomorrow. It'll take until Saturday night before she'll be in Antigo."

The boys were anxious to meet her on the train. They went into Antigo Friday night, just n case she came sooner. They waited by the train, but she didn't show up, so they went back home. The next day they went to the train station again, but come Saturday night, she still didn't arrive. On Sunday, they again went to the train station, but by afternoon she still hadn't arrived. After the last of the incoming trains had arrived Sunday night and she still hadn't arrived, they went back home. All were wondering what had happened to the girl. "Bill," Sam said, "you should go to New York and get her. I don't believe they let girls come out here without an escort, someone to protect her."

The entire night the boys minds were filled with questions and confusion as to why she hadn't arrived. About five o'clock in the morning, a young fellow knocked at the door. All the boys were sleeping, and he kept knocking. Finally, he yelled "Bill, Sam, get up! Your girl is here."

Bill asked him what he was talking about. This boy was the neighbor boy, Willie (Mr. Jensens boy). He was about fourteen years old. Again, he shouted, "Bill, get up! Your girl is here." Bill said, "I don't believe it. Where is she?"

"She's up at our house," the boy responded.

Bill thought he was fooling around, so he didn't get up. Louis got up though, and let Willie in. Willie told Louis that the girl was up at the house. Louis, not completely convinced that the boy was serious, asked if he really meant it.

"Yes," the boy responded. "The taxi brought her this morning from Merrill."

Louis told the boy to wait while he put on his pants. He told the boy, "I'll go up to the house with you."

As Louis went out the door, he yelled at Bill and the rest of the boys, telling them to get up. "The boy didn't lie," he told them, the girl really was there.

Then Louis and Willie started for Willie's house. When they arrived, Louis went anxiously into the house. As they opened the door and went inside Louis could see Christina sitting in the chair, with Mrs. Jensen sitting beside her. she got up and Louis went over to her to introduce himself. "Hello, Christina. I'm Louis." he said.

They shook hands, he kissed her and she said, "I'm glad I've found you." Where is Bill?" she asked.

"He's down at the house," Louis told her. "He'll be up pretty soon. I'll go over there right away and tell him you're here. He didn't believe that you really had come."

Louis was very excited. He left to go get Bill, but before he got to the road, he saw Sam. Sam was going to cut some hay along the logging road. Louis yelled to him that Christina was there. In the meantime, Christina came out of the house with Mrs. Jensen and Louis stood and talked with them until Sam got over to where they were. Christina asked if that was Bill; Louis replied, "No, that's Sam." "Bill's a big fellow." he told her. Christina was very anxious to see which one of the boys was Bill.

Louis ran down the road, about a quarter of a mile to the house. When he got there, Bill was just getting out of bed. Louis told him that the girl had come and he had better hurry and dress as she was coming down the road at that moment. Bill was very excited. He dressed quickly and went up the road, about 200 feet to where the railroad track was and stood, looking in the direction from which the girl would be coming. All the rest of them were walking down the road. Louis ran and joined the rest of them. They saw Bill from quite a distance.

Sam said, "Do you see that fellow over there? That's Bill." Christina asked why Bill didnt come to meet them. Sam said, "I don't know what's wrong with him. He must be frozen. He's standing there like a telephone pole."

Bill just stood there, looking at them and the girl. When they were about fifty feet from each other, Christina stopped. She said, "Bill!" Bill didn't answer. He kept looking straight ahead. Mrs. Jensen yelled at him and asked him if he could say something, but Bill couldn't talk. Then Christina spoke again. "I've traveled 4,000 miles to meet you. Can't you walk four or five steps to meet me?"

Then Bill started moving slowly towards them, and said in a very low voice, "Christina." She walked up to him and they looked at each other for a few moments. They shook hands, kissed, and Christina started crying.

I'm glad you're here." Bill said. "I was looking for you for the past three days in Antigo. Now that you're hear, let's go into the house."

The entire party walked down the road and went into the house where all the boys stayed - the first log house. Christina was very surprised to see the wooden houses. She looked outside and saw that everything was brush and

stumps. Bill explained that this was their first log house and that they had built another one a little ways down the road. He told her that he knew she would be glad to see it because it was going to be their home. Together, they all left and started out for the new house that they had built in the summer.

As they were walking, Bill asked Christina how she liked the country. She replied, "I don't know. It's more like a dream to me. I was talking with your father in the old country and he told me that American farmers raise corn, wheat, and lots of things. I had in mind that I would find a farm like that, but I guess this is okay."

"We'll have corn, wheat, and all kinds of crops after we clear more land," Bill told her

They arrived at the new house, walked in and Bill asked her what she thought about it. "Pretty nice." she said. She was surprised to find curtains on the windows and everything so nice and clean.

They talked for quite some time, getting well acquainted, and eventually Christina said to Bill, "We ought to get married right away."

"I think we ought to go to Savannah, Illinois where my brother John lives." replied Bill. "We can get married there and come right back."

This suited her. Bill told Louis to go to town with the car and send a telegram to John, telling him that the girl had arrived and they were all coming down so Bill and Christina could get married.

The next day they started the old Overland, locked up the log houses, and left for Savannah to see John and have the

wedding of Bill and Christina. When they arrived, Bill and Christina got married and they had a big dinner at John's house. All the brothers and a few friends were there.

After the festivities were over, they left for home and arrived in the evening. They all went over to Bill's log house and had a little supper. At one point after supper, while they were talking, Bill told the boys it was time for them to go back to their own house, so the boys bade Bill and Christina good night and retired to their home.

The next morning they went or with their usual work. They cleared Bill's land, which pleased Christina very much. She started doing the housework and cooking the meals for the boys. She washed their clothes, and generally kept things going.

Everything seemed to be going along fine until winter set in. Louis and Pete decided to go out and work; they figured they'd come back in the spring. Bill said it was okay with him. "Sam," he said, "you stay with me this winter. We'll go out this winter and pick up scme tamerack logs from the swamp and in the spring we'll build a log barn.

Louis and Pete left; Bill and Sam stayed on the farm with Christina for the winter. She was quite surprised to see so much snow. There were snow drifts so high that they nearly covered the log house.

They made it through the winter without incident and in the spring Bill and Sam had quite a pile of logs stacked in the yard. Around April, Louis came back, but without Pete. Louis had a little money and he helped Bill with the log barn.

The bar was 30 feet by 60 feet - built primarily to hold hay. It was about 12 feet high, and there was an addition on the South side for a stock barn. The addition was about

8 feet high and about 12 feet wide. It was big enough for twelve cows and a team of horses. After they had completed the barn, they started clearing land again.

Bill bought a few more cows. They were kept busy cutting wood, hay, and they had seeded about 34 acres with timothy clover. They had cleared the land free of stones. Things were going along fairly well until winter was approaching once again.

In the fall, about the first of October, Christina told Bill that she was expecting to become a mother sometime in December. She was afraid to have a baby so far away from town, what with no other woman around. She said she'd like to go to Savannah where John and his wife lived because she felt it would be much safer than there on the farm.

Bill said it would be pretty hard to leave the stock and he talked it over with Sam. "Sam," he said, "I don't know if this farm is going to pay at all. In think we're wasting our time. You see Pete and Louis left, and I don't know if they're coming back or not. I don't think John will ever move here either. It's pretty hard going and I think it would be a good idea if we were to move out of here. Anyway, we can get out and get a job. Then, after the baby is born, we can still come back and try one more time to make a go of it."

Bill and Christina decided to go. Bill said, "We can have an auction next week sometime and sell everything except the model "T" Ford. We'll use that to drive down to Savannah with. It isn't very good, but I think it will make the trip."

They had the auction; sold the team, all of the cows, and a little hay. After the auction, they boarded up the windows of the log houses and started back to Savannah. It took them about two days to make the trip. On a Sunday afternoon, they arrived in Savannah and went directly to John's house.

John's wife happened to look out the window and saw the model "T" Ford outside, parked up on the lawn, with pots, pans, brooms, and various other belongings hanging from the car. She yelled to John, "Come here quick. I think some gypsy's parked on our lawn." John looked out the window; just as Bill was getting out of the car.

"Why, that's Bill, Christina and Sam." she exclaimed. They opened the door to let them in, and asked, "For the love of Mike! What happened?"

"Oh," Bill said, "We sold out. We're going to stay here this winter."

They all went into the house. At that time, John had three children and Louis was at living at John's because he was working in John's grocery store for the winter. He went out and drove the model "T" to the back of the garage. John said to Bill, "What do you figure on doing?"

"Oh," said Bill, "I think we - that is, Sam and I - can get jobs on the railroad until the baby is born. We probably will go back to the farm in the spring."

John thought that was a pretty good idea. He was glad that they had come down - he was happy to see them. Later, Bill and Christina started looking around for a house to stay for the winter.

John inquired as to whether cr not they had cleared much land. "It's going pretty slow,' said Bill. "The winters are too long and it doesn't give us much of a chance to get things cleaned up. It takes money, too. We only tried raising hay. We had a garden, but it froze up before we could get anything out of it. I believe after we get things cleared up, we can raise different crops." Bill and John talked a while about farming, and after a while, they all retired for the night.

The next day, they found a little house to rent, and Sam, Bill, and Christina moved into it. Bill went to see the fellow in charge of the railroad yard office and asked him for a job. At that time, the jobs were pretty well filled up, he was told. There were different yard masters and different foreman, and Bill didn't know any of them. He went over to the round house where he did know a few of the foreman, and one of them gave both he and Sam a job in the round house.

They went along with their work fine until the first part of December. One day, as John's wife (Lucy) was visiting with Christina she told her that she had better get ready and go to the hospital and not to take any chances by waiting until it was too late.

Bill came home and Louis told Bill that he had better take his wife to the hospital. She was expecting at any time. They took Christina to the hospital, and within a couple of days, their son was born. Christina stayed at the hospital a while longer before she came home.

As they went along through the winter, Bill and Sam had a lot of fun playing with the baby, but they still weren't satisfied. It didn't seem like home; their minds were on the farm most of the time.

In the spring, Bill said to Sam, "We had better go back to the farm. We've invested a lot of money in that farm; we built buildings, the log barn and houses; we worked hard for all the land we cleared and we can't let it all go to waste." They all agreed on this.

Around the middle of April they packed up and took the model "T" and left for Wisconsin. Louis remained with John to work in the store, as John reeded him for a while longer.

Bill and Christina arrived back on the farm on a cold day, while there was still snow on the ground. They found the buildings just as they had left them. They started a fire to warm up the house, and in short order, they were back into the routine of running their farm.

Bill went around with Sam to auctions and they bought a wagon, a team of horses, six cows, and some young stock. They began selling milk, once cgain, and everything seemed to be going well. The warm weather set in and they went about clearing land again. It was kind of a wet year and there was water all around the land. In most places, they had to wear boots as they cleared the land. They kept right on cutting hay, and they sold a little wood. Once in a while, Christina would help Bill clear the land, pile up brush, and burn it.

They kept up the routine all summer, and soon winter was once again knocking at the door. In the fall, Sam decided to go back to the old country and get married so he could make a start for himself. Christina was very anxious for Sam to get married because she wanted some company on the farm. So Sam left Bill and Christina and went back to the old country the first part of October. After a while, Sam returned from the old country with a wife. He stopped in Savanna and visited with John and his wife for a while, then he went directly to the farm.

Bill and Christina were glad to see them. Christina was especially happy that at last she had a sister-in-law.

Sam, Bill and their wives lived temporarily in the same log house. They went along very nicely until the winter came again. The cold weather came and the snow was beginning to pile up around the country. One day, Christina told Sam's wife (Deanna) that she was expecting another baby, and she was glad that Deanna was there to take care of her.

She told her that when the first baby was born, they had gone to John's home in Savanrah, but this time, she would stay put.

After a while, she realized that the time was getting near. Bill told her, "Don't worry. I'll take you to town in plenty of time."

The weather got pretty bad. It snowed and drifted for about three days continuously. The roads at that time were not open for traveling and it was impossible to make the trip to town.

Christina got pretty nervous about the situation and one day she said to Bill, "We have to go to town to see a doctor. We have to do that in a hurry because I know the time is near."

Bill and Sam decided to go, even though it was storming. The roads were packed with two feet of snow and it was still snowing. They took Christina and wrapped her in blankets, got out the model "T" and started for town. It was about forty degrees below zero. They had to make their own road through the high drifts; they shoveled over half of the way.

"Christina", Bill said, "Have patience. We'll soon be to town." Considering the circumstances, Christina was as patient as she could be. They worked desperately to get to the hospital on time and finally, they reached the city limits. The hospital was very near by and they flagged down a passing car and rushed Christina to the hospital. Within a half hour of their arrival, the baby was born. It was a boy. "We got here just in time." Bill said.

As it turned out, Christina was a very sick woman, she was enduring a great deal of suffering. The pain she endured

caused her to lose all self control, and it affected her mental state. She begged to go home.

Bill, upon hearing of this went to her room and tried to calm her. "The baby is fine and everything will be okay." he told her, but through her pain she wasn't able to comprehend what he was telling her. She kept pleading for Bill to take her home, and there was nothing the doctors seemed to be able to do to calm her down.

Bill told her, "Okay, "I'll take you home, but you must wait a few more days until you're feeling better."

"If you don't get me out of here, I'll die." Christina told him. "I'd rather die at home with my baby. Bill was getting nervous about the situation and told the doctor that his wife was insisting that he take her home. The doctor told him, "I've done all I can for her. She should be patient and stay here until she's feeling better. If you take her home, the trip will more than likely worsen her condition. But," he told him, "she's your wife... do what you please."

Bill thought it over and finally agreed that he would take Christina home. He told her to get her things together; they wrapped her and the baby in blankets and left for home.

They got home without incident, and after they got home, Sam's wife (Deanna) took care of Christina. After about a week in bed however, she wasn't getting any better, and seemed completely out of her mind. Bill and Sam talked the situation over and decided that there must have been something seriously wrong with Christina. Bill told Sam, "I think I'll go over to Merrill and get a doctor to come out here and examine her."

So, the following day, Bill went to town and sought out a doctor who accompanied him back to the farm. After examining Christina, the doctor said that there was not much wrong with her, that the excitement and fear she had experienced having the baby had gone to her head and that was what had been causing her to be so irrational.

Bill asked the doctor what should be done for her; the doctor told him to bring her to the Holy Cross Hospital in Merrill where she could get peace and quiet. If they did this, he assured them, she would come out of this situation just fine. He assured them that he would watch over her very closely the entire time she was in the hospital. Christina started crying... she told Bill that all she wanted was her baby and that she didn't care where she went, so he took both her and the baby to the hospital.

The next day however, the doctor told Bill that there wasn't any use in having the baby there in the hospital with Christina. He told him that it would be much better if they took the baby home and fed t bottled milk as Christina's milk didn't seem to agree with the baby anyway. So, after Christina went to sleep, Bill took the baby home, where Sam and Deanna would care for it. He told them to look after his stock also, as he was going to stay at the hospital until Christina got better.

It took three months time before Christina was fully herself again. Most of that time Bill spent walking the streets of Merrill, all the time worrying about Christina and hoping and praying that she would soon be herself again. In the spring of that year (around March), Christina was feeling much better and Bill told her that it was time they went home; he had a lot of work ahead of him.

They left the hospital and went back home. On their arrival, they found the baby and Jimmy, their oldest child,

were fine. Christina was pleased and life went on as it always had... things began to look much brighter for everyone.

When spring arrived, Sam began to clear part of his land and told Bill that he had a nice start... he had his home and a barn, and he'd like to start for himself. Bill and Sam set about clearing Sam's land. One day, they received a letter from brother John in Savannah, it read as follows:

"I'm writing you this letter to inform you that I've got a pretty good friend here in Savannah - an honest worker, and he has four little children. He likes farming and would like to buy my share of the land, but he hasn't enough money to pay for it. I'd like to see him get started anyway, so I figure on sending Louis up with him and his family to help them build a house on my land. I'll pay for the house and I know he's a good worker. You boys know him, his name is Sam Kompus. It will be much better for you boys up there to have company, and some day I might come up myself, but in the meantime, you should get something started. You can expect them to arrive next week; he's going to load the furniture in the box car and he'll come along with Louis. Do everything you can to help him get started.

Your brother,
John"

Bill and Sam were both pleased to hear the news. Bill commented, "I told you that some day we'd make a home of our own. Why, we could have a school and a little community."

A week later, the train bearing the name "Blueberry Special" arrived. It parked on the side track and Louis, Kompus and his wife, and four small children all got off the train. The boys were glad to meet them all, and Louis was

very anxious to see the farm and visit with his brothers. "This is the place - an ideal spot," said Louis. "It looks so beautiful. I can hardly wait until I can start my own home."

Kompus bought a jug of wine with him and he and Louis had a good time talking things over. Bill said to Kompus, "There's a log house where we boys lived in years ago. You can make your home there until we build a house."

Kompus took his family over to the old log house, along with the furniture, and they got busy preparing the place. They cleared about an acre, had some lumber delivered and started to build themselves a house. When it was completed, Kompus and family moved in. Louis went back to Savannah and that summer he got married.

Bill, Sam, and Kompus worked together back and forth, clearing the land, cutting wood, and selling some of the wood they cut. In short order, winter was upon them once again.

They went along until about the middle of March when Bill and Sam received a letter from Savannah. It was from Louis; he was writing to tell them he was coming to live on his farm.

Both Bill and Sam were glad to hear this, and shortly thereafter, Louis, his wife and baby moved there. Bill and Sam were happy to have everyone together again. Together they would build Louis' home and they would all be well satisfied.

Louis moved into the first log house with his wife and baby, and he started clearing his own piece of land. Bill, Sam, and Kompus helped him clear a few acres and soon Louis was building his house and barn. He dug a well, and got everything pretty well lined up. The boys worked in harmony to develop something for their respective futures, and they believed that some day their dreams would come true by establishing farms and nice homes for themselves.

The following summer Sam started to build his house on his part of the land. He was building a house and barn, and with everyone's help, he had a nice start. Once all of the buildings were finished, the boys got busy again clearing land so that they could have room for more cows, hoping that this would lead to an increase in their income.

Behind Louis' house, there stood about sixty acres of evergreen and spruce, standing from one foot to ten feet high, and just as thick as could be. It was August and it happened to be a very dry year, and somehow or other, while they were clearing and burning brush, a fire started on the Northwest corner, across the railroad track. The woods started to burn. The wind was blowing in the right direction to blow the fire through the young spruce. The boys worked desperately to fight the fire; they got all the outside help they could get, but it was impossible to get it under control.

There was a smoke screen for miles around. The county sent out crews of men to help fight the fire; many of the C.C.C. boys were sent out also, and they all worked very hard to stop the fire, but it got into the dry weeds and spread all over the land as fast as it could go. All the roads which led to the farm were blocked by the highway department, and everyone was suffering from smoke inhalation. Many times, the boys didn't know whether they should stay in their homes, or abandon them.

Most everything was burned out - all sixty acres of spruce, and all the swamps were burned, clear up to the boys' homes. Everything was burned down to the clay, and in some places, the fire had burned four or five feet deep into the earth. Bill commented, "We don't have to do much clearing now. The fire has pretty much done all of that for us, but the damage done to the land itself is much worse than what it did to the trees and brush. It will take years to bring life back into that soil."

Time passed, and the boys cleared land faster than they had previously, and in no time they had it fairly well cleaned. Each of them had about twenty acres of land. They went along clearing land, cutting brush, blowing out stones, and burning the brush piles. In the summer they made hay. They tried to grow oats, barley, and grain, but it was hopeless. They couldn't raise a thing. The only crop was timothy hay, and sometimes alsack clover. They helped one another as they went along; they did the best they could.

Winter came and went, and soon summer had come. They were making hay, when on one July day, John, his wife, and their three children came to spend their vacation. They stayed at Louis' house.

They were all helping Louis put hay in his barn. Bill's barn was already full with about thirty tons of hay so Bill, Sam and Kompus were helping Louis with his. At that time, none of the barns had hooks, forks, or carriers to unload hay from the wagons, and so everything was done by hand. On this particular day, they were helping Louis with a load of hay... Sam and Kompus were in the barn distributing the hay around; Bill and Louis were outside, forking the hay into the barn. Suddenly, Louis looked across the road and saw that there was smoke coming out of the top of Bill's barn. Louis told Bill about it and they shouted to Sam and Kompus to come out quickly. Sam and Kompus dropped their forks and ran over to the fire. By the time they got there, the roof was ablaze and the hay was going fast. There was no time to spare. Flames rose into the air as high as 200 feet.

By that time, the women, children and some of the neighbors has noticed the fire. Cars stopped and everyone rushed to the scene of the fire. Bill had a machine across from the barn where he kept his wagon, plow, car, Louis' small truck, and various other items. They all rushed with buckets of water, trying to put the fire out, but it was too far gone to do much of anything to stop it, so they turned

their attention to getting the wagon and tools out. They tried to save all that they could.

They were working as hard as they could to save what they could when they heard a woman screaming. She was running to the middle of the road and she kept on screaming as loud as she could. They saw her coming, but they didn't know what she was screaming about. As she got closer, she yelled to her husband, "Where are my babies?" She had two children, ages four and five. Her husband said that he hadn't seen them, and everyone started looking about for the children. The woman said, "I know the babies went into the fire." She started to go into the fire to get them, but three women held her back. The father also tried going into the fire to look for the children, but they held him back too.

Bill, Sam and Louis were trying to convince them both that the children weren't in the fire, but the fact remained that they knew that there was a real possibility that the children might have gone into the fire after all. By that time, the fire was going full blast. Bill didn't try to save the wagons or any of the farm equipment, since everyone's attention was riveted on the children, and the possibility that they might be in the barn, burning to death. No one cared to try to save anything but the children. They all did what they could to keep the parents from going into the fire, and everyone looked for the children, but there was no trace of them. After a half hour had passed and the children still hadn't shown up, the mother fainted and the father lost control. Bill and Louis decided to take them to town to the doctor, as they knew there wasn't anything they could do to bring the children out of the fire alive, if in fact, they were in the barn.

Louis, some neighbors, and John's oldest son took the car and rushed the children's parents to Antigo to see

Dr. Donahue. The doctor wasn't in. They told the office girl what had happened and they laid the mother down. She was still unconscious and the father was steadily weeping. A few minutes later, the doctor walked in and they told him what had happened. The doctor tried reviving the mother, but she was so far gone she just wasn't coming around. They stayed in the doctor's office for nearly an hour, when they heard a noise downstairs. Two fellows rushed up the stairs, with the children in their arms. When they saw the children, everyone started crying for joy. Louis said, "There are the kids!", Sam couldn't say anything at all.

They brought the children to their mother and tried to wake her up. Her husband was talking to her, trying to get her to understand that the children were alive and well. After a while she seemed to be coming to; she took one look at the children and fainted again. A while later, she came to again, and it was hard to convince her that the children were actually alive.

They all went back to the car and drove home where everyone was happy to see that the children were alive. Bill asked them how they happened to go into the barn, and perhaps, because they were so young, they simply blurted out the truth.

"We went into the horse barn through the little window above the manager." they told them. "We crawled in that little window and went on top of the hay. We had two matches and we struck them together. At first they didn't light, so we tried it again. Then the matches lit and we put them on top of the hay and built a fire so mama wouldn't see us."

Bill asked them what they did next. "We stayed a little while, and it got pretty smoky, so we crawled back through the window and ran out the back door of the horse barn,

far into the woods. We knew mama would give us a spanking if she found out. We went in the woods and watched the fire get bigger and bigger, and we were laughing. But after a while we saw some people walking around the wood stand and we heard them yelling for us. We got scared and we started to run from the woods to the back pasture for home. The fellows saw us and caught us."

"This is true," the mother said, "because yesterday they were building fires outside the house in a stump. I went over there and spanked them and took the matches away and told them never to build a fire again of they'd get another spanking. That's why I thought they were in the barn when I saw it burning. Thank God they weren't."

After a couple of days, the fire had completely settled down, and nothing was left but the ashes and Bill's log house. Shortly after, they finished making hay, and then the boys began building another barn for Bill. Everyone helped. They built a frame barn since it was quicker to build than a log barn; this barn had a hook and carrier.

Soon, another winter was upon them and Kompus decided to go back to Savannah. "It's hard work, and it's hard to make a living." he said. "No one buys keel wood any more, and it's impossible to sell it. I haven't any cows and because the land is so low and there's water standing all around, is very hard to clear. With you boys it's different, you have your land paid for. You have a start, but I'll never make it." The next day he ordered a box car to load up what little furniture he had and he and his family headed back to Savannah.

Bill, Sam and Louis kept working at clearing land and cutting hay. Some years it was very wet, but they always fought their way through the worst of it. Soon the children had become old enough to go to school. Bill had

two children, Sam had three, and Louis had two. The boys began thinking about where they were going to send the children to school. Bill's was the first to get ready to go; he was six.

The nearest school was eight miles away and that presented some problems. One day they went to the county courthouse and talked their situation over with the Superintendent of Schools. He told them that they could transport their children to school and the county would pay them 20¢ for the first child, and 10¢ for the second one. Bill replied, "That won't even pay for the gas. Is there no way of building a school out there?" He told the Superintendent "We hope someday we'll have our own school, in fact, we thought we'd have our own town."

The Superintendent responded, "There aren't enough settlers out there to have a school. Now you boys have been there for years, and nobody else has moved there. The valuation of that land is very low; it'll probably never have enough residents to build a school. The best thing for you to do is to board them out and the town will pay for the board. Or you can take your boys to the Limelen County School; I think it's a little closer."

Bill said that that was probably the best thing for them to do, as it would only be about five or six miles away. If they couldn't transport the children themselves, they could probably arrange to have some of the neighbors pick up the children when they picked up their own. When the school term started, a man from Lincoln County who had a school route picked up Bill's child and took him along.

As time went by, and the rest of the children started attending school, Sam decided to take Louis', Bill's, and his own children to school every day himself.

Time passed, and they cleared more land, and raised more stock. They planned to raise different crops, but they weren't very successful at it. Everything they tried ended in failure. It seemed that the more land they cleared, the less income they had. It got so they couldn't get enough hay to keep up the stock. All the profits they got from the milk they sold went back out for hay, grain and cows. In the winter, they couldn't make headway at all and they began to get discouraged. The families got larger, and expenses got larger too. There were doctor bills and it seemed it was always one thing or another. People often came around and told the boys that they were wasting their time. They knew what the land was like; they said the soil was poor and they would never be able to raise anything but timothy hay. The boys knew it was true because in previous years, they had triec raising different crops, and they always failed.

The boys saw that the future looked pretty bleak, so one day they went to the courthcuse and had a long talk with the county agent concerning their land. The agent told them that all they had been told was true. The land was very sour and there was a hard pan underneath where the water stayed in the land, and it was pretty hard to succeed under those circumstances. "I don't want to discourage you boys. I know you have invested a lot of money and hard work for many years, but my advice would be for you boys to get a better plot of land, closer to a school; land that you can depend on for future farming."

The county agent went on to say, "There'll be no one for years who will try to buy that land for the purpose of making a farm of their own. If you boys want my assistance, I'll be glad to help you along, and I'll try to do whatever I can." Bill thanked him and told him he would see him again, the next time they were in town.

The boys went home. They kept on clearing land and worked together and tried to make things go, but after the depression began, their was ro market for keel wood, and milk prices were extremely low. They were up against it for feed for the cows in the winter, and were forced to ask for relief in order to feed them for the winter. In the summer, they could depend on their own hay, but there wasn't an abundance of that either.

They carried on for two or three years like that, and one winder day the County Relief Agent came out and brought some blankets, a few groceries, and some things for the children. They had quite a talk about the land and things as they existed. The relief agent told the boys to write to the government. He told them that the government had a program that would reinstate many farmers that were in the same fix as they were in. Bill responded that he didn't know who to write to, and the agent told them to write to President Roosevelt. He said to tell him of their circumstances and he was certain that the boys would get a reply. So the boys decided to write to the President and find out what could be done.

That summer, the railroad decided to do away with the branch they had running through Sam's land. There were no more logs to haul, so they took away the rails, and some of the ties. That discouraged the boys more than ever, and they decided it no longer made sense for them to stay on the farm.

In the meantime, the County Board passed a resolution that put most of the town of West Ackley on forest crops, which covered all the land around (except for the boys farms), and prohibited anyone from buying land near the farms for the purpose of establishing a farm or homestead.

The boys gave much consideration to this happening and decided that there certainly wasn't any future for them on

the farms. Because of the County Boards' decision, no one would settle near them in the future, just as no one had done so in the past. They were very anxious to sell out, but they found it impossible to sell to any one individual with a clear conscience because they knew that whoever bought the land would have the same results as them. The only solution, they decided, was to write to the government and see if they could dispose of the land for forest crops. Sam, Louis and Bill talked it over at length and decided to write the President. With Louis and Bill's input, Louis' wife wrote the following letter.

Merrill Wisconsin
Route 6
February 21, 1934

Franklin D. Roosevelt
Washington, D.C.

Our Dear President:

We are located in the town of West Ackley, Langlade County, Antigo, Wisconsin, in sections 19, 29 and 30. I am writing this letter to inform you of the situation we find ourselves in. We hope this letter will make clear the situation we find ourselves in, and in order to explain our circumstances as simply as possible, I've broken this letter down into three basic areas.

1. Condition of the Land. We bought this land thirteen years ago as cutover land for farming purposes. We have been trying our best to establish a farm and to keep our taxes paid up-to-date. For the past thirteen years, we've worked hard, with all the ambition we could muster, in our attempt to succeed in farming. Much to our dismay, we discovered that we have been working against ourselves, attempting to produce crops on soil that has been burned

out and will never be any good. In addition, we are in a perpetual frost belt which has throughout the years made it nearly impossible to raise sufficient crops to keep us going. Because of this, we are unable to see a future for ourselves, or for our children.

2. Condition of the School. It's of utmost importance that our children get a good education, but we find it a hard proposition to send the children to school for several reasons. In the winter months, it is more than inconvenient; the school is about eight miles East of where we live, and makes it nearly impossible to reach in the worst of the winter conditions. We had thought that by this time there would have been enough settlers to build a school closer to home, but now it seems that this will never happen.

3. The Community. We haven't got a community. We live 14 miles from the city of Antigo, and in the event of illness, which we have experienced in our family, it costs fourteen dollars to call for the Doctor, and that's a very difficult expense for us to meet, given the difficulty we've experienced in earning a decent living from our farms.

The nearest church is fourteen miles, also in the city of Antigo, and this makes it very difficult for us and our families to attend church.

Because we are so far away from everyone else, we find it very hard to get someone with a threshing machine to come out here and do our threshing, and as a final obstacle in our attempt to successfully farm our land and make a homestead, the County Board recently passed a resolution that virtually isolates us and makes it impossible for us to continue farming.

We will gladly cooperate with the government in any way that would make it possible for them to buy us out. For

the sake of our families we hope you will give this matter your most serious consideration.

Yours respectfully,

Sam, Louis, Bill Ballas & families

The following day, Louis mailed the letter, and they went about the business for the next five or six days. Then, they received an answer. Louis took the letter to Bill's house. It read,

"Dear Friends,

I received your letter in regard to the condition of your land. We have established a program which now is serving all over the United States in cases such as yours, and others with similar circumstances. It's a rehabilitation program which I am sure will address itself to your needs.

We never grant individual favors, but I am sure our program will reach you in the near future."

The boys felt a little encouragement from the letter and believed that someday they would be able to sell their land to the government.

For another year, they carried on as usual, and then went to the County Agent and talked their situation over. The County Agent told them the same thing - that there was a relief program going on, and that they would try to put the boys at the top of the list. He explained that they were buying many farms here, and that there were a lot of properties all over the country in need of the government's assistance. He told the boys that he would try to help them and see to it that they got situated into an area with better land for farming.

Another year passed and the boys continued to have high hopes that the government would provide better land for them. They wrote to various agricultural and forestry officials and continued to take their situation before the County Board, as well as going to see the County Chairman personally to ask for assistance.

Still another year passed, and on one spring day in 1938, an appraiser from the local government office appeared to appraise all of the farms. Shortly after that, another government agent came to the boys to take an option for the land. The boys were elated. At last, they knew the government was really going to buy them out. The agent made an offer, and the boys happily accepted.

In the fall of 1939, everything was settled. This was a glorious day for the boys and their families, a day they had been looking forward to for years. They remembered the days they had worked so hard to settle the land, the days they had lived patiently waiting for things to get better, and they knew that the memory of those days would be with them for the rest of their lives.

Bill commented "Now we can look forward to a better life, knowing that experience has taught us that where there is life, there is hope.

The land has gone back to forest. A young plantation of trees that will mark "The Last Settlers."


The end

