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## Book shares American dreams

### 'Dandelions for Dinner' recounts one family's struggle to survive World War II

Chapter 1, Death is in the Air: The battle had begun quicker than I expected, and the chaos was a surprise. We knew our lives might be at an end as soon as haphazard cannon shots fired by members of the Andartes — Greek communist guerilla fighters — began to rain down near our home in the early morning's darkness on Sept. 22, 1944.

Though I was only 11 years old, I was well aware that others, certainly many more worthy, wealthy and able than us, had not made it. I also knew that whether we would survive this dark day was no sure thing. In fact, the odds were heavily against us.

When a shell, luckily a dud, crashed through our neighbors' home and slammed into its kitchen, mother grabbed my younger brother, Stathi.

"We are leaving," father said and directed the four of us through a maze of narrow streets to my uncle's home several blocks away.

There, along with a number of other traumatized, war-weary people, we huddled in a storage room, temporarily safe from the random and sloppily aimed explosions.

From that bunker, we trusted that our side — the Royalists and their "Protective Forces" — was winning, that the invaders would not take our town and that we would be able to continue our lives in the same rhythms that we had always lived them.

But these notions were

promptly dashed when we saw a soldier, one of ours and dressed in his street clothes, walking away from the fight. Father asked him how we were doing and if our town, Gargaliani, had been able to defend itself against the communist attack. The man scoffed at us and declared that the battle had ended and the invaders had prevailed.

Before long, we began to see more and more of our fighters abandon Gargaliani's defense — an even more troubling, foreboding sight. In minutes, bearded communists filled our street. The conquerors ordered us, along with everyone else, to move through the town. They herded us past its plateia, the main square and center of community life; father and I moved together while mother kept a grip on Stathi, who was only 5 years old.

We were funneled into Gargaliani's high school, where the victors undertook to sift their supporters from the crowds. The communists spoke of reconciliation, but it quickly became clear they were not in a forgiving mood. We watched for hours as they separated their sheep from the goats and they mercilessly eliminated problem people who failed their makeshift loyalty tests. It was only through a gift of fate that we were passed when, as supporters of the Royalists, we should have been failed. They set us free onto the streets.

Unsure what to do, we stood before the house of the leader of the Protective Forces. If to the

#### LAW & POLITICS



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victor belong the spoils; to the vanquished belongs woe — the heroic warrior was on the run, his residence in flames.

Communist guerilla fighters moved quickly through the streets and crisscrossed the plateia. Whatever rules previously governed our civilized town had disintegrated. We were on our own, and there was no one to turn to — anarchy had triumphed. For us to survive, father knew we had to get off the streets and to the safety of our home. But that wouldn't be easy. Before us, we could see the Andartes, intoxicated by bloodlust, fill the plateia. They moved everywhere throughout the square as each of their unmerciful deeds fueled other, more incomprehensible and unconscionable ones.

Father led us quickly and quietly through the streets of our town as the bone-jolting cracks of all-too-close firearms serenaded us. The streets were littered with the discarded dead, our neighbors frozen in random poses of horror. When we were only 20 or so meters from our home, we recoiled at the sudden

appearance, directly in front of us, of a teenager we knew named Takis. Two barely pubescent Andartes, armed with pistols and holding rifles, stood beside him.

Mother never cared much for Takis or his family. Over the years, our relationship with him had been perfunctory and inconsequential; he wasn't part of our world, and we weren't part of his. Prior to that moment, Takis' existence had never mattered to us one way or another.

But when Takis saw father, the young man's eyes darted back and forth and, as if he had finally located his prey, he pointed at father.

"There's one. There's one right there. He is one of them."

Father froze.

"Shoot him; shoot him now," Takis ordered.

The obedient Andartes raised their rifles and took aim at father.

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The above is an excerpt from a book that my father and I wrote and recently published. The project began when Sam Stamatis, my logical and easygoing dad, retired after a long career as an electrical engineer.

I suggested he keep busy by writing down the events of his childhood — things he never talked about — and told him I would put it together, perhaps for future generations of our family. Together, we wrote "Dandelions for Dinner: Greece at War and a Family's Dream of America."

Stamatis and his father, Sam, will celebrate the release of their book with a Q&A and signing at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the National Hellenic Museum, 333 S. Halsted St.