

OSHCHIMA

The Story of a Small Village in Western Macedonia



By
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INTRODUCTION

This is the story of Oshchima, a small village in western Macedonia whose people have lived through good times and tragedies.

My initial motivation for writing this book was to document individual experiences of Oshchimians who lived through the turbulent war times in the first half of the 20th century. During the last decade or so, many Canadian Oshchimians expressed interest in having their personal life experiences documented and preserved for future generations, before they were lost forever.

Without the reader having personal experience of what life was like in Oshchima during the first half of the 20th century, I felt that understanding the stories expressed by the interviews alone could not be fully appreciated, especially by those unfamiliar with Oshchima. For that purpose I have included background information on 19th and 20th century Macedonian history as well as what is known about Oshchima's history.

To truly define the character of ordinary Oshchimians, the story delves into details of life in the village describing important events and daily activities that would ordinarily fill a yearly cycle.

The book begins with an overview of the region's 19th and 20th century history as witnessed through the eyes of the Macedonian people. It then turns inward and examines Oshchima's own history as was orally handed down from generation to generation from pre-recorded times to the present.

History stops for a year in 1939 and takes you on a journey to experience the trials and tribulations of village life, tradition, and family.

MACEDONIAN HISTORY FROM 1800 to 1950

Balkan History 1800 to 1878

Even before Alexander's time Macedonia was a single nation. With time she grew and shrank but always remained a single nation until her partition in 1912-13.

If the Balkan roots lie in antiquity then the first stem that created the modern Balkan countries sprang up in the 19th century. The 19th century is the most important period in modern Balkan history.

There is no event in recorded history that unfolded without Super Power intervention and there is no time in recorded history where one nation put another nation's interests ahead of its own.

Prior to 1829 there was no state, place name or geographical region called Greece or Hellas. During Roman times, after the fall of the Macedonian Empire, there existed a small region called "Achaia" (pages 126-134, Fishwick, *The Foundations of the West*). Also see the inside cover of Vasil Bogov's book "Macedonian Revelation, Historical Documents Rock and Shatter Modern Political Ideology". Similarly, prior to 1878 there was no state, region or place name called Bulgaria. The history the new states adopted prior to the 19th century belongs to all the Balkan people, the Macedonians in particular.

Macedonia's problems can be traced back to the 1200s after Tsari Grad (Constantinople) was sacked by the crusaders in 1204. While the Privoslaven (Byzantine) Empire was recovering from the crusader attack, a Nomad Muslim tribe was entering Anatolia from Central Asia. The tribe was called

“Ottoman” named after their first leader Osman. The Ottomans first made their presence and crossed into Europe in 1345 as mercenaries hired by the Byzantines to defend their Empire. As the Ottomans grew in number they settled at Galipoly, west of the Macedonian Dardanelles (Endrene), and used the area as a staging ground for conquest.

In 1389 the Ottomans attacked Kosovo and destroyed the Pravoslavna army, killing the nobility in the process. In 1392 they attacked and conquered geographical Macedonia including Solun but not Sveta Gora (Holy Mountain). In 1444 while attempting to drive north, through today’s Bulgaria, they were met by the crusaders led by the king of Hungary, Wladyslaw III of Poland, supported by George Brankovic of Serbia and by János Hunyadi of Transylvania. But there were disagreements among its leaders, and the Christian army was annihilated at Varna in 1444. Soon afterwards the Ottomans besieged and took Tsari Grad in 1453, looting all the wealth that had been accumulated for over two millennia.

The Ottomans then turned northwest and in 1526 attacked and destroyed the Hungarian army, killing 25,000 knights. After that they unsuccessfully tried twice to take Vienna, once in 1529 and then again in 1683. The failure to take Vienna halted the Ottoman expansion in Europe.

After sacking Tsari Grad the Ottoman nomads adapted much of the Pravoslaven administration and feudal practices and began to settle the Balkans. The conquered people of the new Ottoman territories became subjects of the Empire, to be ruled according to Muslim law. At the head of the Ottoman Empire sat the Sultan who was God’s representative on earth. The Sultan owned everything and everyone in the empire. Below the Sultan sat the ruling class and the Pashas (generals) and below them sat the Raya (protected flock). Everyone worked for the Sultan and he in turn provided his subjects with all of life’s necessities.

In the beginning Ottoman lands were divided into four categories. The “meri” lands such as valleys, forests, mountains, rivers, roads, etc., belonged exclusively to the Sultan. The “temar” lands were meri lands loaned or granted to Ottoman civil and military officials. Years later as the Empire introduced land reforms, temar estates converted to private property and became known as “chifliks”. The “vakof” lands were tax-exempt lands dedicated for pious purposes and to support public services such as fire fighting, etc. Finally, the “molk” lands were private lands occupied by peoples’ houses, gardens, vineyards, orchards, etc.

The Islamic Ottomans belonged to the Sunni sect of the Muslim religion. The Empire’s subjects belonged to one of two religiously (not nationally) divided Millets. The Islam Millet was exclusively for Muslims and the non-Islam or Roum (for Roman) Millet grouped all other religions together.

The reasons for separating Muslims from others had to do with how Islamic law was applied. Unlike our laws today, Ottoman Muslim law had nothing to do with civil rights and everything to do with religious rights. Muslim courts were appointed for the sole purpose of interpreting the Koran and very little else. The Koran dictated Muslim conduct and behaviour, including punishment for crimes. In the Ottoman mind only religion and the word of God had sole authority over peoples’ lives. Religion was the official government of the Ottoman State. Islam was the only recognized form of rule that suited Muslims but could not be directly applied to non-Muslims. So the next best thing was to allow another religion to rule the non-Muslims. The obvious choice of course was the Pravoslaven Christian religion, which was the foundation of the Pravoslaven (Byzantine) Empire. There was a catch however. The official Muslim documents that would allow the “transfer of rule” were based on an ancient Islamic model, which denounced all Christianity as a corrupt invention of the “Evil one”. The conservative Turks regarded the Christians as no more than unclean and perverted animals. Also, the ancient documents called for sacrifices to be made. A Christian religious leader, for being granted leadership by the Muslims, was expected to sacrifice his own flock on demand, to prove his loyalty to the Sultan. It was under these conditions that the Patriarch accepted his installment as sole ruler of the Christian Orthodox faith and of the non-Muslim Millet.

While the first Sultans destroyed Tsari Grad, they tolerated Christianity as the Government of the non-Muslim Millet and sold the Patriarchate to adventurers who could buy (bribe) his nomination. Once nominated, the Patriarch in turn sold consecration rights to Bishops, who in turn regarded their gain as a “legitimate investment” of capital and proceeded to “farm their diocese”. Under Ottoman rule the

Pravoslaven religion became a corrupt business, having little to do with faith and more to do with making money. As more and more bishoprics fell into the hands of the new Patriarch, faith at the top began to fade away. This was also the beginning of the end for the Slavonic (Macedonian) Churches in the Ottoman Empire.

In addition to being a religious ruler, the Patriarch and his appointed Bishops became civil administrators of the Christian and non-Muslim people. Their authority included mediating with the Turks, administering Christian law (marriages, inheritance, divorce, etc.), running schools and hospitals, and dealing with the large and small issues of life. There were no prescribed provisions, however, on how to deal with criminal matters or the limit of authority on the part of the Bishops. In other words, there was no uniform manner by which Christian criminals could be punished or how far a Bishop could exercise his authority. This opened the way for interpretation, neglect, abuse, and activities of corruption such as nepotism, favouritism, and bribery.

For the purposes of administration, the Ottoman territory was divided into provinces called "Vilayets". A "Vali" governed each province and was equal in rank to a "Pasha" (military general). There were six Vilayets in European Turkey, Albania, Jannina, Scutari, Solun, Monastir, and Ushkab. To the east were Endrene (Andreonople) and Istanbul (Tsari Grad). The larger Vilayets were sub-divided into two or more "Sandjaks" each governed by a "Mutesharif", who also ranked as a Pasha. Kazas (departments) were in turn governed by Kamakams (prefects) whose rank was that of "Beks" (military colonel). After that came the "Nahieis" (districts) governed by Mudirs (sub-prefects).

Muslim Turks always administered the Ottoman government and the military. However, due to lack of manpower to rule an expanding empire, the Ottomans adopted the "devshirme" or child contribution program in the 1300's. Young Christian boys were abducted by force and converted to Islam. After being educated, the bright ones were given administrative roles and the rest, the "Janissary", were given military responsibilities. The devshirme was abolished in 1637 when the Janissary became a problem for the Sultan. Some regions, however, continued this practice up until the 19th century.

Failure to seize Vienna in 1683 weakened the Ottoman Empire and brought it into constant conflict with Austria and Russia. One such conflict ended in 1699 with the Treaty of Karlwitz. By this Treaty, the Ottoman Empire lost Hungary to the Habsburgs (Austria) and part of the Ukraine to Russia.

After annexing Hungary, the Habsburg Empire (1200-1900) became ruler of the Catholic part of Eastern Europe while the Ottomans ruled the Orthodox Balkans. The Habsburg Empire, in 1867 (after losing the war with Germany in 1860), became known as the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

Another minor but crucial event for the south Balkans took place in 1711 when one of the Moldovian gospodars (prince) was accused of collaborating with the Russian army and was held responsible for the Russian invasion of Romania. As punishment the Ottomans replaced all Romanian and Moldovian gospodars with Phanariots from Istanbul.

The Phanariots were a group of Christians, mostly from a wealthy class of people, who lived in the "Phanar" or lighthouse district of Tsari Grad. After the Sultan installed the Patriarch in Istanbul, the Phanar became a thriving Christian culture. As I mentioned earlier, the Sultan placed the Phanariot Patriarch in charge of the Christian millet because he found him more agreeable than his other (poor) Christian counterparts. The Patriarchy functioned like a state within a state with its own administration and services. Having the Sultan's favour, the Patriarch sought the chance to expand his dominion over the entire Eastern Christian Church by replacing whatever legitimate bishoprics he could with his own corrupt people. For example, the Old Serbian bishoprics were abolished as punishment for helping the Habsburgs. At about the same time, the Macedonian bishopric, including the powerful Ohrid bishopric, was also abolished. After becoming gospodars, the Phanariots, one by one, replaced all the Romanian bishoprics. After becoming gospodars in Romania, the Phanariots abolished Church Slavonic (Macedonian) liturgy and replaced the Macedonian speaking clergy with Romanians. The Romanians, however, didn't care much for the Phanariots and pursued Romanian ways. Eventually, as more and more bishoprics were shut down the Phanariots redefined the old culture, Christian faith and Christian education.

The Ottomans trusted the Phanariots well enough to give them a role in the central Ottoman administration. This included the office of the “Dragoman”, the head of the Sultan's interpreters’ service (Muslims were discouraged from learning foreign languages). Phanariots participated in diplomatic negotiations and some even became ambassadors for the Ottoman Empire. Phanariots were put in charge of collecting taxes from the Christian Millet for the Ottomans and whatever they could pilfer from the peasants they kept for themselves. Many scholars believe that Romania’s peasants never suffered more than they did during the Phanariot period. Phanariots also secured food and other services for the Ottoman court.

The Phanariots, through the Dragoman, were largely responsible for providing “all kinds” of information to the outside world about the Ottoman Empire, including their own desires to rule it. Some Phanariots were educated abroad in London and Paris and were responsible for bringing information into the Ottoman Empire. Despite what modern Greeks claim, the Phanariot dream was to replace the Ottoman Empire with a Christian Empire like the Russian model. In theory, they wanted to re-create a multi-cultural Byzantine type Empire but with a Patriarch in charge. This is where the “Megaly Idea” comes from, which to this day dominates Greek expansionist desires. The Phanariots believed that with Russian or German help it was possible to achieve the Megaly Idea. Unfortunately for the Phanariots, the Super Powers had different plans for the Balkans.

The next turning point for the Ottoman Empire came during the Russian-Turkish war of 1769 to 1774. After Russian forces occupied Romanian principalities, Turkey was defeated and the 1774 Kuchuk Kainarji Treaty gave Russian ships access to the Black Sea, the Bosphorus, and Endrene (the Macedonian Dardanelles). By this treaty, Russia became the “protector of Orthodox Christians” inside the Ottoman domain including Wallachia (Romania) and Moldavia. Also, for the first time, the Ottomans allowed Russian (outside) consular agents inside their empire. Russia at the time did not have enough ships to fill the shipping demands so many of the shipping contracts went to Phanariot captains who were on friendly terms with both the Russians and Ottomans.

The Kuchuk Kainarji Treaty bolstered Russian expansionism in the Balkans, which alarmed the Western Powers and initiated the “Eastern Question”; “What will happen to the Balkans when the Ottoman Empire disappears?” The Eastern Question of the 1800’s later became the Macedonian Question of the 1900’s.

At about the same time as Russia was making her way into the Balkans, the West was experiencing changes of its own. The industrial revolution was in full swing, coming out of England and progressing towards the rest of the world. France was the economic super power but was quickly losing ground to England. The French Revolution (1789) gave birth not only to new ideas and nationalism, but also to Napoleon Bonaparte. As Napoleon waged war in Europe and the Middle East, French shipping in the Mediterranean subsided only to be replaced by the Phanariot and British traders. French trade inside the Ottoman territory also declined and never fully recovered. By land, due to the long border, Austria dominated trade with the Ottoman Empire exercising its own brand of influence on the Balkans, especially on the Serbian people.

As the turn of the 19th century brought economic change to Europe, the Balkans became the last frontier for capitalist expansion. By the 1800’s Europe’s political, economic, and military institutions were rapidly changing. Western governments and exporters were aggressively pursuing Balkan markets on behalf of their Western manufacturers. This aggressive pursuit smothered Balkan industries before they had a chance to develop and compete. As a result, Balkan economies began to decline causing civil unrest and nationalist uprisings. While Western countries were left undisturbed to develop economically and socially, external forces prevented Balkan societies from achieving similar progress. Mostly regulated by guilds, Balkan trades could not compete with Western mechanization and went out of business. Without jobs, most city folk became a burden on the already economically strained rural peasants, for support. The economic situation in the Balkans deteriorated to a point where people could no longer tolerate it and they started to rebel against their oppressors.

From the modern Balkan states, Serbia was the first to rebel. The first revolt took place in Belgrade in 1804, the same year that Napoleon became Emperor. The immediate causes of the armed

uprisings were oppression and a further deterioration of the Ottoman system. When Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798 the Sultan took troops from the Balkans and sent them to fight the French in Egypt. Leaving the region unguarded, in 1801 Belgrade became a sanctuary for bandits and unruly Janissaries. Robbery and murder became commonplace. Then in February of 1804 some bands of killers murdered seventy prominent village leaders and priests. They did this to frighten the population and to stop their Serb leaders from complaining to the Sultan. To save themselves, some of the Serb leaders fled to the forests and organized the villagers into armed units. They attacked the Janissary in the countryside and fought them until they were pushed back to Belgrade. The war ended in a stalemate.

The stalemate was broken in 1806 when the Serbs decided to no longer expect help from the Sultan and took matters into their own hands. At about the same time the French and Turks became allies. Since France was already an enemy of Russia this alliance made Turkey an enemy also. Now being enemies of the Turks, the Russians intervened on behalf of the Serbs and in 1807 helped them take back Belgrade. The Sultan offered the Serbs full autonomy but the Russians advised against it. They insisted on negotiating for full independence instead. Unfortunately, when the war between Russia and France ended, Russia in 1807 made peace with Napoleon and became allied with both France and Turkey. For selfish interests on Russia's part, the Serbs were left on their own. The Serbs lost Belgrade to a Turkish army attack in 1808 and many Serbs fled into exile while the rest continued the guerilla warfare from the forests.

The revolt began again in 1809 when Russia renewed its campaign with Turkey, and ended in 1813 with a Serb defeat. The Serbs failed to win because Russia was unsure about its commitment to Serbia. Russia had a lot more to gain by appeasing Turkey especially when war with France became imminent. When Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, the Russians abandoned the Serbs and in 1813 an Ottoman army invaded Serbia, forcing many of her people to flee as refugees into the Austrian Empire.

Relations between the Serbs and Turks turned from bad to worse when the Turks, extorted provisions from the Serbs by force, tortured villagers while searching for hidden weapons, and started raising taxes. A riot broke out at a Turkish estate in 1814 and the Turks massacred the local population and publicly impaled two hundred prisoners inside Belgrade. The Serbian leaders decided to revolt again and fighting resumed on Easter in 1815. This time Serb leaders made sure captured Turk soldiers were not killed and civilians were released unharmed. To ease Turkish fears, the Serbs also announced that this was a revolt to end abuses, not to gain independence.

After the Russians defeated Napoleon in 1815, the Turkish feared that Russia would again intervene on Serbia's behalf. To avoid this the Sultan gave Serbia autonomy.

After the Russian-Turkish War of 1829-30, a new treaty was signed which put an end to most abuses in Serbia. All Muslims, except for a small garrison, left Serbian territory. Serbs took control of the internal administration, postal system, and courts. Individual taxes and dues paid directly to the Sultan were replaced by a single annual tribute payment from the Serbian State to the Sultan. Serbia remained autonomous until 1878 when she was granted independence.

Second to rebel against Ottoman rule were the Phanariots. The Phanariot uprising was not a true rebellion like the one in Serbia. Unlike the Serbs, most Phanariots were wealthy and, as I mentioned earlier, already enjoyed substantial privileges in Ottoman society. To revolt was a poor choice for them because they had a lot to lose and little to gain.

When the Ottomans imposed the millet system the Phanariots began to gain advantages over the other Balkan Christians. In time, the Patriarch appointed clergy took control of administering the entire Christian millet. Patriarch appointed clergy had religious, educational, administrative, and legal power in the Ottoman Balkans. In other words, Phanariots were more or less running all political, civil and religious affairs in the Christian Millet.

Religion, not ethnicity or language, was the first criterion for identifying individuals within the millet system. Religion, not language or place of residence, distinguished wealthy Christians from wealthy Muslims. There was no definable place called "Greece" other than the one-time Roman province of antiquity called "Gracea". Morea was about the only inland region that resembled anything that could be considered Greek. Because Morea was poor, most of the countryside had no Turkish presence and

Christian primates or "kodjabashii" virtually ruled themselves. Christian militia or "armatoli" kept the peace, while "klefts" or bandits roamed the hillsides, robbing and pillaging their neighbours.

By the 1700s, Phanariot ship owners in the islands dominated Balkan commerce. As Christians, Phanariot traders were exempt from Muslim ethical and legal restraints (especially when dealing with money) and were permitted to make commercial contacts with non-Muslims. Westerners who did business in the region used local Jews, Armenians, and Phanariots as agents. Different branches of the same Phanariot family often operated in different cities, ties of kinship reducing the risks of trade.

Between 1529 and 1774 only Ottoman ships were allowed to navigate the isolated waters of the Black Sea. Phanariot trade grew without competition from the Venetians or other Western traders. As I mentioned earlier, the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji opened the Turkish straits to Russian commerce. There were not enough Russian ships to meet all shipping demands so Ottoman Phanariots filled the void. Also, the Napoleonic conflicts between England and France created new opportunities for the neutral Phanariot ships and by 1810 there were 600 Phanariot trading vessels conducting commerce.

For the Phanariots, especially the well to do, Ottoman rule provided many advantages in comparison to other Balkan groups. Rich ship owners, agents, prosperous merchants, high officials in the Christian Church, tax collectors, gospodars in Romania, primates in the Morea, and members of the interpreters' service all had much to lose and little to gain by rebelling.

How then can one explain the movement that led to the revolution in 1821? Poor peasants, poor village priests, poor sailors, etc. who lived in the Morea had no investment in the Ottoman status quo. Without ideas or leadership, these people lived miserable lives and preyed on each other to survive. Outside interference started the rebellion.

The original instigators were members of the "Filiki Eteria" a secret society founded in 1814 in the Russian port of Odessa. The Filiki Eteria sent representatives into the Morea to recruit fighters. A number of important klefts and district notables answered their call by organizing peasants and forming armed bands.

The 1821 revolution began as a planned conspiracy involving only selected elements of the population. At that time the idea of "nationality" remained very elusive, even for the most enlightened revolutionaries. The intent of the uprising was to liberate all of the Balkan people from Turkish tyranny and unite them in one Christian State.

The Filiki Eteria planned to start the uprising in three places. The first was the Morea where a core group of klefts and primates supported the idea. Second was Tsari Grad, where the Phanariot community was expected to riot. Third, Phanariot forces were expected to cross the Russian border from Odessa to invade Moldavia and Romania. Plans, however, did not go as expected. When 4500 men of the "Sacred Battalion" entered Moldavia in March 1821, the Romanian peasants ignored the Turks and instead attacked the Phanariots. The Phanariot invasion of Romania was a complete failure. At the same time, "class divisions" in Phanariot society hampered the uprising in Istanbul. The Turks reacted by hanging the reigning Patriarch. A new Patriarch, at the insistence of the Super Powers, was appointed at Tsari Grad for the first time in 1850.

The only success was in the Morea and only because the primates feared the Turkish Pasha's retribution. Fearing arrest or even execution, the primates joined the klefts and massacred the Turkish population of Morea. Turkey was unable to quell the uprising and the conflict remained a stalemate until 1825. The stalemate, in part, was due to internal problems among the Phanariots, reflecting pre-existing class differences i.e. the armed peasants and Klefts in the Morea were loyal to Theodoros Kolokotronis, a kleft. Opposing them were the civilian leaders in the National Assembly which were made up mostly of primates and well-connected Phanariots. By 1823 the two sides were locked in a civil war. The stalemate was also due, in part, to interventions from Britain, France, and Russia. Each of these states had strategic political and economic interests in Turkey, and each wanted to make sure that the results of the war in Morea would be in their best interest. The British were sympathetic to the Phanariot cause (in part due to Phil-Hellenism) but at the same time they wanted a strong Turkey to counter Russia. Initially, the British were prepared to support Turkey to prevent Russia from gaining control of the Turkish Straits and threatening the Mediterranean trade routes. Later as Britain gained control of Cyprus her plans changed.

The Russian Czars, in turn, had sympathy for the Christians but feared the possibility of a Morean state becoming a British ally. French investors held large numbers of Turkish State bonds, which would be worthless if Turkey fell apart. France was also anxious to re-enter world politics after her defeat by Russia in 1815.

The Super Powers, from the stalemate, could see that the Morean revolution would not go away and were prepared to intervene and make sure the final result was acceptable to their own interests. Foreign interference ran from 1825 until 1827. It began with the intervention to block the Egyptian navy from invading Morea in 1825 (Mehmet Ali's capture of the port of Navarino) and ended in 1827 when the British, French, and Russians sank the Egyptian navy. The European Powers sent a combined fleet of 27 ships to Navarino Bay to observe the Egyptian navy but things got out of hand when musket shots were fired and the observation escalated into a battle. When it was over the European fleet had sunk 60 of the 89 Egyptian ships. The loss of the Egyptian navy left the Sultan without armed forces and the inability to reclaim the Morea or resist the Super Powers. Turkey was squeezed into providing concessions for Morea but the Ottomans kept stalling. To end the stalling the Russians invaded Turkey in 1828 (Russian-Turkish War of 1828-1830) and almost reached Istanbul by 1829. The Sultan gave in to Russian demands. Russia too gave in to Western Power demands and agreed to British and French participation in the peace settlement of the London Protocol of 1830, which gave birth to a small, independent Greek kingdom. Prince Otto of Bavaria, a German prince, and a German administration were chosen by the Super Powers to rule the new Greek Kingdom. The choice was a compromise but acceptable to all three powers.

Two overwhelming "forces" came into being in the 19th century, which transformed the Balkans. The first was the 1848 "Western economic revolution" which thrust the Balkans into social and economic upheaval. The second was "increased intervention" from non-Balkan political forces. As the century advanced, these developments merged, working not for the interests of the Balkan people but for the benefit of Europe's Super Powers.

Before I continue with internal Balkan developments I want to digress a little and explore the "external forces" and their "political desires" in Balkan affairs.

Besides Turkey, there were six Super Powers during the nineteenth century. They were Russia, Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany. From time to time the Super Powers expressed interest in the Balkan population but, in crisis situations, each followed its own interests. When the Super Powers made compromises, they did so to avoid war with each other and often failed to address the real issues that caused the crisis in the first place. This is similar to what the Super Powers are doing in the Balkans today.

Russia tended to be the most aggressive and was usually the cause of each new Turkish defeat. The 1774 Kuchuk Kainarji Treaty allowed Russia access to the north shore of the Black Sea, gave her "power to act" on behalf of the Orthodox millet, and to conduct commerce within the Ottoman Empire. Russia's goals in the Balkans were (1) to gain exclusive navigation rights from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea for both merchant and military ships and (2) to annex Tsari Grad and Endrene (the Macedonian Dardanelles) for herself, both of which were unacceptable to the Western Powers.

After the end of the Crimean war in 1856, by the Treaty of Paris, the Western Powers made sure Russia's desires for expansion were curbed. First, all Russian warships were barred from the Black Sea and second, the Black Sea was opened to merchant ships from all the states. After that all the Super Powers, not just Russia, became the guarantors of the Balkan states.

From 1815 to 1878 Great Britain was Russia's strongest rival for Balkan influence. British interests led her to intervene against the Turks in the Morean revolution of the 1820s, but went to war against Russia in 1853 (Crimean war) on Turkey's behalf.

The British goals in the Balkans were to maintain access to the Eastern Mediterranean and to secure shipping lanes to India. Most of the trade routes passed through Turkish controlled waters. Turkey was too weak to be a threat, so Britain was inclined to oppose France, Russia, and Germany when they became a threat to Turkey.

To bolster her claim to the Eastern waterways, in 1878 Britain took control of the island of Cyprus and in 1883 occupied Egypt and the Suez Canal. After that Britain kept a close watch on Morea and Russian access to the Straits, interfering less in Ottoman affairs.

Britain also had important commercial interests inside the Ottoman Empire, and later in the successor states. Investors in railroads and state bonds took as much profit as they could, as soon as they could, which in the long term contributed to the Ottoman Empire's instability.

France, like Britain, had both political and economic interests in the Balkans. During the Napoleonic wars, France was a direct threat to Ottoman rule (Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798) but after her 1815 defeat she lost military and political clout. France had commercial rights in Turkey dating back to the Capitulation Treaties of the 1600s and relied heavily on trade with the Ottoman Empire.

In the 1820s, France joined British and Russian intervention on behalf of the Moreans. France did this mostly to protect her commercial interests but also to counter-balance Russian-British domination in the region. Also, let's not forget the "Philhellenic sympathy" the French had for the Moreans.

More so than the British, French investors played a key role in Balkan policy. During the Eastern Crisis and the war of 1875-78, the Turkish State went bankrupt and French bondholders were the biggest potential losers in case of default. So when the Ottoman Public Debt Administration was created to monitor Turkish State finances, French directors were right in the middle of managing Ottoman State finances. Like the British investors, French investors forced Turkey to maximize their returns and ignored the needs of the Ottoman people.

Austria had been the main threat to Ottoman rule at one time, but after 1699 Russia replaced her in that department. Austria retained a major interest in the Ottoman Empire mainly because it was neighbouring Hungary. In other words, Vienna had no desire to replace a weak Ottoman neighbour with a strong Russia or Russian allies like Serbia or today's Bulgaria.

Austria's goals were aimed at creating a Western Balkan economic resource and a potential market. Control of the Adriatic coast was key to Austria's foreign trade through the Adriatic Sea. Austria made sure she exerted enough influence to keep the hostile Super Powers away and to prevent the growing new Balkan nations from annexing it. Austria had no desire to annex the Western Balkans for herself. The ruling German Austrians, or the Hungarians had no ethnic or religious ties to the Slavs in the region.

After 1866 Germany (not Austria) became the leader in Central Europe. Austria now had only southeastern Europe where she could exert influence. Austria was too weak to absorb the Balkans by herself so she preferred to sustain a weak Ottoman Empire instead of "Russian controlled" states. This explains why Vienna took an anti-Russian position during the Crimean War, and why she became allied with Germany later. Germany was an ally of both Russia and Austria, but Austria turned on Russia so Germany had to abandon the Russian-German alliance to please Austria.

Serbia and Romania created problems for Vienna, which she unsuccessfully tried to manage through political alliances and economic treaties. Romania feared Russian occupation and Bucharest generally accepted alliances with Austria. Serbia, however, had fewer enemies and less incentive to bend to Austrian wishes. The two states (Austria and Serbia) found themselves on a collision course that resulted in the war of 1914 (World War I).

Italy became a state in 1859 after fighting a successful war against Austria. In 1866, the Kingdom of Piedmont united the Italian peninsula and took its position as a new Super Power. Italy lacked economic and military might in comparison to the other Powers but made up for it in influence at the expense of the weaker Ottoman Empire.

Italy viewed the Western Balkans, especially Albania, as her "natural zone of influence" and her leaders watched for opportunities to take the area away from the Turks. Italy's Balkan goals were not only a threat to Turkey but also to Serbia and Greece who both had aims at seizing the Adriatic. Italy was too weak to seize Balkan territory so she followed a policy of "lay and wait" until 1911 and 1912 when she took the Dodecanese Islands and Tripoli (Libya) from the Ottomans.

Germany, like Italy, became a Super Power at a later time after the German State unification of 1862 to 1870. Due to her strong military and economic might, Germany had more influence in Europe

than Italy, but no direct interest in Balkan affairs. For the new German Empire the Balkans were only economic outlets.

After defeating Austria in 1866, Germany made Austria-Hungary an ally and to retain loyalty, Germany had to support Austria in Balkan matters. After 1878 Germany could no longer reconcile Russian and Austrian differences over the Balkans and by 1890 Germany and Austria strengthened their alliance and pushed Tsarist Russia into a conflicting partnership with republican France. After that, German policies in the Balkans supported economic and military investments in Turkey. This made Germany a rival not only of Russia but also of Britain. The Super Power alignments of 1890-1914 established a pattern that dominated the two world wars.

Germany had no stake in the development of any of the successor states which left her free to support the Sultan (and later the Young Turk regime). German officers trained Turkish troops and German Marks built Turkish railways.

The Ottoman Empire of the 19th century was the weakest of the Super Powers, especially after the Crimean war. At the 1856 Treaty of Paris, Britain and France granted Turkey “legal status” in the Balkans that was far beyond her ability to control. The Western Powers desperately wanted the Ottoman Empire stable and intact.

The Ottomans, on the other hand, mistrusted the other Powers, partly because they were infidels and partly because of bad past experiences. Russia was clearly Turkey's greatest enemy, bent on dismantling her empire. To keep Russia at bay, Turkey cooperated with the other Powers but was always wary of falling under the influence of any single Power. From the 1820's to the 1870s, Britain was Turkey's guardian. After 1878 Germany replaced Britain as economic and military sponsor. Turkish relations with the new Balkan states were poor at best. Any gains for them usually meant losses for Turkey.

The Western Super Powers believed that if corruption, crime, and poverty could be eliminated, Balkan unrest would end and the Ottoman Empire could remain intact. After all, they didn't want anything to happen to their goose that laid golden eggs. So instead of kicking the “sick man” out of Europe, they pushed for reforms. However, it was one thing to draw up reforms and another to make them work. By examining Ottoman efforts in Macedonia it was obvious that the Turks lacked the resources and the will to carry out reforms. Also, Europeans failed to grasp that suggestions and wishes alone could not replace five hundred years of Ottoman rule. The Ottomans believed their way of life was justified.

In 1865, a group of educated Turks formed the secret Young Ottoman Society. Their aim was to revitalize old Islamic concepts and unite all the ethnic groups under Islamic law. Threatened with arrest, the Young Ottoman leaders went into exile in Paris.

In 1889, a group of four medical students formed another secret Young Turk Society. They rejected the “old Islamic aims” and embraced a new idea, “Turkish nationalism”. Turkish nationalism became the foundation for a secular Turkey in 1908 after the Young Turks came to power and again in 1920 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey proper.

The next important event in Balkan history was the Crimean War of 1853 to 1856, which pitted Russia against Turkey, England, and France. The crisis ignited over the issue of who was in control of Christian Holy Places in Turkish-ruled Jerusalem. Orthodox and Catholic monks quarreled over insignificant issues, like who should possess the keys to locked shrines. By old treaties Russia and France were the international guarantors of Orthodox and Catholic rights respectively, but in 1852 Napoleon III tried to undo that. He needed to distract French Catholic public opinion away from his authoritarian government so he instigated the problem.

Because the issues of dispute involved the highest levels of the Turkish government, to the nations involved it became a symbolic struggle for influence. The Russians badly misjudged the other Powers and failed to see that Britain could not accept a Russian victory. Tensions rose as all sides prepared for conflict. A Russian army occupied two Romanian Principalities failing to see that this threatened Austria's Balkan interests. Russia expected gratitude from Vienna for her help against Hungary in 1849 but Austria refused her. With support from the Western powers, the Turks refused to negotiate and in 1853 declared war on Russia.

The Crimean War pulled in the Super Powers even though none of them wanted to go to war. In 1854 Austria forced the Russians to evacuate the Principalities and Austria took Russia's place as a neutral power. In 1856 the Allied Western Powers took Sevastopol, the chief Russian port on the Black Sea, by force. After that Russia agreed to their terms at the Treaty of Paris.

As a result of the Treaty of Paris, the Danube River was opened to shipping for all nations. Russia lost southern Bessarabia to Moldavia. She also lost her unilateral status as protector of Romanian rights. The two Romanian principalities remained under nominal Ottoman rule. However, a European commission was appointed and, together with elected assembly representatives from each province, was responsible for determining "the basis for administration" of the two Principalities. Also, all the European powers now shared responsibility as guarantors of the treaty.

On the surface it appears that Turkey won and Russia lost the Crimean war. In reality however, both Russia and Turkey lost immensely. The Crimean War financially bankrupted Turkey. As for Russia, she lost her shipping monopoly on the Black Sea and allowed capitalism to enter into Eastern Europe. Russia did not only lose influence in Romania and Moldavia but she was also humiliated in front of the entire world. This set the stage for future conflicts including the most recent "cold war".

As I mentioned earlier Turkey's financial collapse opened the door for Western Governments to manipulate internal Ottoman policies as well as divert needed revenues to pay foreign debts. On top of that the Ottoman Empire was forced into becoming a consumer of Western European commodities. While Western Europe prospered from these ventures, Ottoman trades and guilds paid the ultimate price of bankruptcy. Lack of work in the cities bore more pressure on the village peasants, who were now being taxed to starvation, to feed unemployed city dwellers, as well as maintaining the status quo for the rich. The Ottoman Empire became totally dependent on European capital for survival, which put the state past the financial halfway point of no return and marked the beginning of the end of Ottoman rule in Europe.

By 1875 the Ottomans entered a crisis situation owing 200 million pounds sterling to foreign investors with an annual interest payment of 12 million pounds a year. The interest payments alone amounted to approximately half the state's annual revenues. In 1874, due to some agricultural failures, military expenses, and worldwide economic depression, the Turkish government could not even pay the interest due on the loans. On the brink of bankruptcy, to preserve Ottoman stability and to make sure Turkey paid up Western European debts, the Super Powers in 1875 took over the management of Turkish revenues. This was done through an international agency, called the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA). To continue to receive credit, the Sultan had to grant the OPDA control over state income. Therefore, control of the state budget and internal policies fell into foreign hands. The agents in control were representatives of the rich capitalists and were only interested in profit, and very little else. This was definitely not to the advantage of the local people.

Macedonia 1878 to 1903

As well as paying heavy taxes to the Ottomans, the village peasants of the Balkans were now burdened with additional taxes to pay off Western European loans. For some the burden was too great and it manifested itself in a number of independent uprisings. Discontentment with Turkish rule, economic plight, and pure neglect of human life precipitated the "Eastern Crisis".

The first of these uprisings began in 1875 in Bosnia but soon spread to Montenegro and Serbia. About a year later the village peasants in Bulgaria showed their discontentment and staged a massive liberation struggle. To a lesser extent, the liberation struggle extended to Macedonia where an armed insurrection took place in Razlog in 1876.

The growing discontentment of the peasantry in the Balkans disturbed the Great Powers who now had a vested interest in protecting the Ottoman Empire from falling apart. A conference was convened in Tsary Grad (Istanbul) in 1876 to discuss strategies on how to deal with the insurrections and the "Eastern Question" in general. Representatives of Russia, Austria-Hungary, Britain, Germany, France, and Italy attended the conference and decided to place Macedonia and Bulgaria under the control of the Great

Powers. Turkey rejected their demands and soon after found herself at odds with Russia. By early 1877, war broke out in Serbia and Montenegro followed by a massive Russian invasion of Bulgaria. The Turkish armies were decimated and Turkey was forced to talk peace. Peace was negotiated between Russia and Turkey on March 3rd, 1878, (the San Stefano Treaty) without Western Power consent. Russia, as usual, was concerned more with self interests and less with the interest of the people she was trying to protect, so she sought the opportunity to realize a long held ambition in the Balkans, access to the Mediterranean Sea. The following agreements were reached:

1. Turkey was forced to recognize Greek sovereignty over Thessaly.
2. Montenegro was declared independent.
3. Turkey was forced to provide autonomy to an extended Bulgaria that included Macedonia, Western Thrace, a part of Albania, and a district of Serbia.

The conclusion of this treaty sent shock waves not only through the Western Powers, who had a lot to lose (financial investments in the Ottoman Empire), but also to states like Greece and Serbia who had territorial ambitions of their own towards Ottoman territories.

Disturbed by the Russian tactics, the Western Powers re-convened the Eastern Question at Berlin in July 1878. At this point the San Stefano agreement was revised as follows:

1. Independence was granted to Serbia and Montenegro as well as Romania.
2. Bosnia was given to Austria-Hungary (“Britain did not want more Slavic states to form”. Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century, p. 379)
3. The territory of present day Bulgaria was divided into two administrative districts. Bulgaria proper and Eastern Rumelia. Eastern Rumelia was given back to the Turks.
4. Macedonia, Thrace, Kosovo, and Albania were given back to the Ottomans.

On the verge of bankruptcy, Russia could not resist the Western Powers and gave in to their demands.

With the exception of clause 23 that required the Turks to provide a small degree of economic autonomy to Macedonia, Macedonia was once again committed to Ottoman oppression. The conditions of clause 23, unfortunately, were never enforced by the Super Powers or complied with by Turkey.

In the spring of 1878 Macedonia reached the crossroads of her destiny. She was one step away from overthrowing six hundred years of Ottoman tyranny when Western Powers stepped in to prevent it. Why? Was Macedonia less deserving than Greece, Serbia or Bulgaria? Were the Macedonians less Christian than the Greeks, Serbians or Bulgarians? Was the Macedonian struggle to free itself from Turkish tyranny not convincing enough? The real reason for throwing Macedonia back to the wolves had little to do with religion, nationalism or human rights and a lot to do with economics, profit, and access to the Mediterranean Sea. Russia desperately wanted to access the Mediterranean but the Western Powers desperately wanted to prevent it. Here is what Trevelyan has to say about that. “Throughout the 19th century Russia was striving to advance towards Constantinople over the ruins of the Turkish Empire. She was drawn forward by imperialist ambition, in the oppressed Christians of her own communion, many of whom were Slav by language and race, and by the instinct to seek a warm water port—a window whence the imprisoned giantess could look out upon the world. The world however, had no great wish to see her there.”

“Canning (a British politician, 1812-1862) had planned to head off Russia’s advance, not by direct opposition, but by associating her with England and France in a policy of emancipation, aimed at erecting national States out of the component parts of the Turkish Empire. Such States could be relied upon to withstand Russian encroachment on their independence, if once they were set free from the Turk. The creation of the Kingdom of Greece was the immediate outcome of Canning’s policy” (page 372, Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century).

Russia had no economic stake in the Ottoman Empire so she wanted the Turks out of the Balkans. The Western Powers invested heavily in the Turkish economy and infrastructure and were anxious to keep the Ottoman Empire alive and well in the Balkans. The success of the Crimean war (Turkey won), convinced the British to slow down their policy of creating new Balkan States in favour of exploiting the lucrative Ottoman markets and collecting returns on loans made to Turkey.

At the stroke of a pen Bulgaria was freed (autonomous) while Macedonia was sentenced to suffer further indignity and humiliation. Back in the hands of the Greek clergy and the Ottoman authorities, Macedonia now entered a new era of suffering and cruelty, destined to pay for the sins of all the other nations that rose up against the Ottomans.

Between the spring and summer of 1878, Macedonia's fate was decided not by Russia or the Western Powers, but by Britain alone. Britain who created Greece and introduced the curse of Hellenism into the Balkans, was now prepared to fight Russia, by military means if necessary, to keep her out of the Mediterranean Sea. To avoid war a compromise was reached. "The essentials of this compromise were agreed upon between England and Russia before the meeting of the European Congress, which took place at Berlin under the chairmanship of Bismarck, and formally substituted the Treaty of Berlin for the terms of San Stefano" (page 377, Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century).

"To our (British) eyes the real objection to the San Stefano lies not in its alleged increase in Russian power, but in the sacrifice of the fair claims of Greeks and Serbians, who would not have remained long quiet under the arrangements which ignored their racial rights and gave all the points to Bulgaria. Lord Salisbury felt this strongly, especially on behalf of Greece."

"Beaconsfield's success, as he himself saw it, consisted in restoring the European power of Turkey. It was done by handing back Macedonia to the Port (Turks), without guarantees for better government. This was the essence of the Treaty of Berlin as distinct from the Treaty of San Stefano. 'There is again a Turkey in Europe' Bismarck said. He congratulated the British Prime Minister – 'You have made a present to the Sultan of the richest province in the world; 4,000 square miles of the richest soil.' Unfortunately for themselves, the inhabitants went with the soil. Since Beaconsfield decided, perhaps rightly, that Macedonia should not be Bulgarian, some arrangements ought to have been made for its proper administration under a Christian governor. Apart of all questions of massacres, the deadening character of the Turkish rule is well known. Lord Salisbury seems to have wished for a Christian governor, but nothing was done in that direction. A golden opportunity was thus let slip" (page 378, Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century).

After gaining status as protector of the Suez Canal and the waterways to India, Britain was awarded Cyprus. Content with her gains, Britain became lax and agreed that Russia and Austria-Hungary should oversee Ottoman affairs in Macedonia. "The British people, when left to themselves, neither knew or cared who massacred whom between the Danube and the Aegean. Byron's Greece had appealed to their imagination and historical sense, but the Balkans were a battlefield of kites and crows" (page 373, Trevelyan, British History in the 19th Century).

The Macedonian people were not at all happy about what went on in the Berlin Congress and showed their discontentment by demonstrating first in Kresna then in Razlog, but as usual their pleas were ignored. The Turkish army was dispatched and the demonstrations were violently put down.

Facing the possibility of becoming extinct in Europe, the Ottoman Empire began to re-organize and take demonstrations and rebellions seriously. After the Greek uprising the Sultan became distrustful of the Phanariots and expelled most of them from his services. He came close to ousting the Patriarch and his tyrannical Bishops but Russia stepped in and prevented it. Many of the Slav people were not happy with being ruled by a Greek Patriarch and after Russia's show of solidarity to the Greeks and the Patriarch, they threatened to convert to Catholicism. This created a real concern for Russia. "In the days when Panslavism was a force in Russia and General Ignatieff ruled Constantinople. Russia naturally feared that if the Southern Slavs became Catholics she would lose her ascendancy over them" (page 73, Brailsford, Macedonia). In 1870 Russia convinced the Sultan to allow a new millet to form, thus creating the schismatic Bulgarian Exarchate Church which was immediately excommunicated by the Patriarch. Fracturing the Rum (Romeos) Millet into two opposing factions suited the Turks perfectly because now Christians, instead of rebelling against the Turks, would fight one another. Now, in addition to the Ottoman and Greek, a third government was created that would rule the same people in three conflicting ways. From a religious standpoint, minor differences distinguished the Greek from the Bulgarian Church. Both were Christian Orthodox, except that the Greeks acknowledged the authority of the Greek Patriarch while the Bulgarians obeyed the Bulgarian Exarch. The language of liturgy was about the only distinct

difference between the churches. The Bulgarians used the Old Church Slavonic (Macedonian), familiar to Macedonians, while the Greeks used an ancient language no Macedonian could understand. The creation of the Exarch Church stepped up nationalistic activities inside Macedonia and increased the stakes for territorial claims.

From the day they were liberated, both Serbia and Greece were strengthening their economies and poisoning their people with nationalist propaganda. Serbia introduced education for the masses and was teaching her youth about her ancient exploits and past empires that ruled Kosovo, Albania, and Macedonia and that the Slavs (except for the Bulgarians who were Serbia's enemies) were truly Serbs.

The modern Greeks on the other hand, infatuated with the discovery of the Ancient Greeks, were going overboard promoting "Hellenism" and making territorial claims on Macedonia based on ancient rites. At the same time, the Greeks were making wild claims that all Orthodox Christians were Greeks. Their argument was that if a person belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church they were Greek. Here is what Brailsford has to say about that. "Hellenism claims these peoples because they were civilized by the Greek Orthodox Church. That is a conception which the Western mind grasps with difficulty. It is much as though the Roman Catholic Church should claim the greater part of Europe as the inheritance of Italy. To make the parallel complete we should have to imagine not only an Italian Pope and a College of Cardinals which Italians predominate, but a complete Italian hierarchy. If every Bishop in France and Germany were an Italian, if the official language of the church were not Latin but Italian and if every priest were a political agent working for the annexation of France and Germany to Italy, we should have some analogy to the state of things which actually exist in Turkey" (page 195, Brailsford, Macedonia). Here is what Brailsford has to say about how the Greeks received title to the Orthodox Church. "The Slavonic (Macedonian) Churches had disappeared from Macedonia, and everywhere the Greek Bishops, as intolerant as they were corrupt-'Blind mouths that scarce themselves know how to hold a shephook'-crushed out the national consciousness, the language, and the intellectual life of their Slav (Macedonian) flocks. It is as a result of this process that the Eastern Church is a Greek Church. The sanctions of 'Hellenism' so far as they rest on the Church, are the wealth of the Phanariots and the venality of the Turks...the Slav libraries in the old monasteries were burned by the Greek Bishops" (page 196, Brailsford, Macedonia).

After 1878, for a Macedonian to be Hellenized meant that he had to give up his name, his own language, his own culture, his history, his folklore, and his heritage. Here is what Karakasidou has to say. "...The ideological content of notions of the Hellenic nation, which far from being ecumenical has shown itself to be intolerant of cultural or ethnic pluralism, has lead many inhabitants of Greek Macedonia to deny or hide those aspects of their own personal or family pasts..." (page 125, Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood).

Hellenization was never made by choice, only by brute force. One was made to "feel Greek" when it suited the Greeks. The moment one wanted something from the Greeks or one crossed one of the Greeks, they were reminded of their "true identity" and quickly "put in their place". To be Hellenized meant to lose dignity and to suffer constant and unwarranted humiliation because no matter how hard one tried to be a Hellene, they could never measure up. A Hellenized person was neither Greek nor Macedonian but a soul in limbo.

To quote David Holden "To me, philhellenism is a love affair with a dream which envisions 'Greece' and the 'Greeks' not as an actual place or as real people but as symbols of some imagined perfection" (page 12, Greece without Columns). What is Hellenism then?

Before I answer that question, I will once again quote David Holden. "Further back still beyond the War of Independence, when the modern nation-state of Greece came into being for the first time, the whole concept of Greece as a geographical entity that begins to blur before our eyes, so many and various were its shapes and meanings. But if geography can offer us no stable idea of Greece, what can? Not race, certainly; for whatever the Greeks may once have been,..., they can hardly have had much blood-relationship with the Greeks of the peninsula of today, Serbs and Bulgars, Romans, Franks and Venetians, Turks, Albanians,...,in one invasion after another have made the modern Greeks a decidedly mongrel race. Not politics either; for in spite of that tenacious western legend about Greece as the birthplace and

natural home of democracy, the political record of the Greeks is one of a singular instability and confusion in which, throughout history, the poles of anarchy modulated freedom has very rarely appeared. Not religion; for while Byzantium was Christian, ancient Hellas was pagan” (page 23, Greece without Columns). Unlike Macedonia and other Balkan nations who have natural and vibrant languages, Greece artificially created and used (up until the 1970’s) an imposed adaptation of the classical language called the Katharevousa. “Hellenizing” under these conditions not only rendered the Hellenized races mute but also imposed a meaningless and emotionless language on those doing the Hellenization. (If you want to learn more about the Greek language controversy read Peter Mackridge’s book “The Modern Greek Language”).

When Greece was born for the first time in 1832 it was unclear what her national character was? To quote David Holden, “ the Greek nation-state was a product of western political intervention-‘the fatal idea’ as Arnold Toynbee once called it, of exclusive western nationalism impinging upon the multi-national traditions of the eastern world. By extension, therefore, at any rate in theory, it was a child of the Renaissance and of western rationalism (page 28, Greece without Columns).

Officially, Greeks call their modern state Hellas, and are officially known as Hellenes, but at the same time they call themselves Romios (from the Turkish Rum millet) implying that they are descendents of the Romans. Greece, however, is a derivation of the Latin “Graecia” (page 29, Holden, Greece without Columns) the province of the Western Roman Empire which extended from Mount Olympus to the Peloponnese. Again, to quote David Holden, “ its international use to describe the sovereign state that currently occupies that territory is merely a reflection of the fact that ‘Greece’ in this modern sense is literally a western invention (page 29, Greece without Columns).

If philhellenism is a love affair with a dream, then Hellenism is a dream of a few “evil geniuses” (Phanariots) who sought to destroy what was real in favour of creating something artificial, like a Frankenstein’s Monster. Hellenism may be a dream for a few (mad men) but it has been a nightmare for Macedonia. Here is what Karakasidou has to say. “Greek natural identity was not a ‘natural development’ or the extension of a ‘high culture’ over the region of Macedonia, although now it is frequently portrayed as so. The ideology of Hellenism imposed a homogeneity on the Macedonian region and its inhabitants” (page 94, Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood).

If modern Hellenism is a western invention propagated by the Phanariots, then who are the Modern Greeks? According to historical records, a large majority of the Greeks of Morea that fought during the Greek War of independence were Tosk Albanians that became Hellenized after the 1930’s. The Slavs of Peloponisos (what happened to them?), the Vlachs of Larissa, the Albanian Tosks of Epirus (what happened to them?), were also Hellenized. In other words, the Greeks of today are a “forcibly Hellenized diverse collection of people”. Even the Greek national dress, the fustanella, is fake. The fustanella is the national costume of the Albanian Tosks (page 230, Brailsford, Macedonia).

In addition to desperately trying to define an identity and a language for herself, after 1878 Greece stepped up Hellenization activities inside Macedonia through the Orthodox Church and by employing (bribing) the services of the Turkish authorities. Willing young Macedonian men were enrolled in Greek schools in Athens, with promises of education, only to be poisoned with Hellenization and Greek nationalist propaganda. Many of these young came back (home) to Macedonia only to be used as agents of Hellenism.

After the creation of the Bulgarian Church, Bulgaria was not far behind in her attempts to instill Bulgarian nationalism in the Macedonian youth. This was most evident when young Macedonian men, like Gotse Delchev, were expelled from the Bulgarian schools for wanting to use the Macedonian language and to learn Macedonian history. Here is what Radin has to say about that. “In the 1870’s, six Macedonian districts seceded from the Exarchate. Bulgarian schools were destroyed, with the Macedonian teaching intelligentsia organizing students against the Exarchate. Macedonian literary associations were discovered, to study Macedonian history and culture. The periodical ‘Vine’ was published to mobilize Macedonians against the vehement propaganda. In 1891, an attempt was made to re-establish the Macedonian Church. This national renaissance significantly produced a Macedonian

intelligentsia that was to later prove instrumental in founding IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) (page 45, A. Michael Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

Russia's rash attempt to gain access to the Mediterranean, by creating a "Greater Bulgaria" (San Stefano Treaty), gave the Bulgarians rationale to make territorial claims on Macedonian territory. On top of the Greeks forcibly trying to Hellenize Macedonia, the Macedonian people now faced a new enemy, Bulgarian chauvinism. In the hands of the Turks, Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, and Serbians, Macedonian misery seemed to flourish as if all the evil in the world was unleashed at once and struck Macedonia with all its fury. What makes Macedonia's misery even more tragic is that the entire world stood by and watched the horrors unfold and did nothing.

While the Greeks employed brutality, the Bulgarians adopted intrigue to sway Macedonians to their side. They were publicly calling for Macedonian autonomy all the while they were promoting a Bulgarian nationalist agenda. In the next decade after 1878, nationalist fever gripped the Balkans. The new nations (Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria) were making exclusive claims not only on Macedonian territory, but also on the Macedonian people, each claiming that Macedonians were Serbs, Greeks or Bulgarians. Each new nation desperately tried to prove its claim by propaganda campaigns, coercion, and forcible assimilation. Here is what Brailsford has to say on the subject. "Are the Macedonians Serbs or Bulgars? The question is constantly asked and dogmatically answered in Belgrade and Sofia. But the lesson of history is obviously that there is no answer at all. They are not Serbs, ... On the other hand they could hardly be Bulgarians... They are probably what they were before a Bulgarian or Serbian Empire existed..." (page 101, Macedonia Its Races and their Future). As for the Macedonian's being Greek, this is what Brailsford has to say. "The Greek colonies were never much more than trading centers along the coast, and what was Greek in ancient times is Greek today. There is no evidence that the interior was ever settled by a rural Greek population" (page 91, Brailsford, Macedonia).

"The period immediately following the Berlin Congress demonstrated therefore, that Balkan chauvinist intent was not merely to occupy, govern and exploit Macedonia, but to eradicate the Macedonian culture, and superimpose its own culture upon a people alien to it. By guile, gun, religion and quasi-legal manipulation, the Balkan States attempted to divest the native Macedonians of their language, religion, folklore, literature, traditions and consciousness. The ultimate goal therefore, was to anaesthetize the Macedonian people, and then remold them into Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbians" (page 45, A. Michael Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

Did it not once occur to Westerners that in the heart of Macedonia, perhaps there was a unique Macedonian culture living there? Did it not once occur to them that perhaps the Macedonians with their multicultural and multiethnic character did not want to be molded to fit the Western profile of what a nation should be? By throwing her back to the Greeks and the Turks, was Macedonia punished for her stubborn ways, for refusing to be molded into a monolithic uni-cultural, pseudo-homogeneous nation? Only those who participated in the 1878 Berlin Congress and who forever committed Macedonia to suffer more cruelty and injustice can truly answer these questions. One thing is for certain, however, as the West is now growing old and gaining wisdom and experience it is realizing that the way to peace and prosperity in a small planet is tolerance of minorities, democratic freedom, and cultural and national pluralism. Macedonia, as it turns out, always had those qualities. As for the rest of the new Balkan States, one day when they realize the error of their ways they will forever bear the shame of what they did to their neighbours, the Macedonians.

I know that words can do no justice to the suffering the Macedonian people endured since 1878. I will do my best to describe what life was like to be ruled by the Turks, governed by the Greeks, pillaged by the Albanians, and robbed and beaten by the villains of society. It has been said that education was a curse in Macedonia. No educated Macedonian lived to a ripe old age. If a man was educated, he died at the hands of his enemies, not because he was educated but because he was feared. The Turks feared him because he might rise up against them. The Greeks feared him because he might oppose them. The Bulgarians feared him because he might expose them. (If you wish to learn more about the horrors committed by the Turks in Macedonia, read Brailsford's book, Macedonia, Its races and their Future).

The 1878 Treaty of Berlin awakened the Moslem Rulers (Turks and Albanians) in the Balkans to the reality that their Empire came close to disintegrating. But instead of searching for a rational solution, the Turks did what they always did best, turned to violence. They took counter measures to suppress the “troublemakers”, by extinguishing their rebellious spirit. In practice this manifested itself into a variety of punishments that included the following:

- A) Taxes were raised to pay off Western loans. The Turks and Muslim Albanians were a predatory (parasitic) race and produced nothing themselves. Instead they lived off the earning power of the Macedonians and other Christians.
- B) To prevent further uprisings and rebellions, the Turks stepped up espionage activities and searches for weapons. In reality however, the weapons searches were nothing more than an excuse to take revenge and further pillage the Macedonian peasants. Those who could afford to pay bribes paid off the Turks to avoid misfortune. Those who couldn't were tortured and usually beaten to death. If by any chance weapons were found, the entire village was burned to the ground, even if the weapons belonged to a thug. The Turks were not above shaming or kidnapping Macedonian women either. In fact it was common practice for Muslim soldiers to grab Christian women while conducting raids on villages. (For a Macedonian woman death was preferable over a lifetime of shame). The Macedonians of the Ottoman era were extremely moral people and conducts of this nature were not taken lightly. Unfortunately, there was nothing that could be done to avenge the women, so women carried the burden of shame alone, for the rest of their lives. No Christian was allowed to bear arms and defend his family. There was no one to complain to because in most cases the perpetrators and the villains were the law. No Muslim could be punished for doing harm to a Christian, no matter what the crime.
- C) In addition to contending with the Turkish authorities, Macedonians faced kidnappings and assaults from the Albanians. Any man, woman or child that ventured too far from the village exposed themselves to the risks of being kidnapped (an old Albanian pastime) by Albanian marauders or by Turkish outlaws who demanded a hefty ransom for a safe return. It was certain death if no ransom was paid.
- D) There were also the roving Turkish patrols that traveled the highways and if someone happened to cross paths with them, they would be robbed, beaten, and humiliated in a number of different ways, depending on the mood of the soldiers.
- E) The greatest threat to Macedonian life came from the Bashi-buzouks or armed civilian Muslims. Most of the Bashi-buzouks were Albanians who made a career of pillaging, burning Macedonian villages, and torturing the inhabitants. After 1878, Bashi-buzouk raids escalated to a point where they became intolerable. The Christians had no legal recourse to fight back. Being Muslims, the Bashi-buzouks were immune from legal prosecution. The only way Macedonians could fight back was to flee to the mountains and join the outlaws.
- F) Let's not forget the annual routine homage and tributes paid to the Albanian clans for not burning the villages and crops, the local policemen for not humiliating and beating family members, and the local hoods for not assaulting and bullying the women and children.
- G) It would be an injustice if I didn't mention the way Turks treated women. No Macedonian woman was safe from the Turks. If a woman caught a Turk's eye there was no escape, she would be plucked kicking and screaming from her home and family, converted to Islam by force, and thrown into a harem to become an object of lust. No woman was safe, not even a bride on her wedding day.

I want to mention here that after the Western Powers decided to do something about the Ottoman cruelty against the Macedonians, they began to record complaints from the people. Macedonians were encouraged to report acts of injustice and cruelty to the European consuls. All the complaints were recorded in what was referred to as “the blue books”.

By the time taxes and bribes were paid to the authorities, the warlords, and the town hoods, a Macedonian family was left with 25 to 40 percent of their meager annual earnings to live on. To make ends meet Macedonian men were accustomed to taking on additional jobs within the Ottoman Empire or abroad to make enough to survive the winter. It has been said that after twenty-five years of achieving

autonomy, Bulgaria was thriving economically thanks to the cheap labour of the Macedonian migrant workers.

I want to mention here that Macedonians have always earned their living by sweat and blood and deserve more than they have been dealt in the past. The maestro's (maistori) of ancient Rome were skilled Macedonians, not Greeks as modern history claims them to be. Even the word "history" comes from the Macedonian saying "tie i storia" which translates to "they did that" or "they made that".

The West, including the USA and Canada were to some extent, also beneficiaries of cheap Macedonian labour. Western traders flooded Macedonia with cheaply manufactured goods and bankrupted the local (antiquated) industry (run by the guilds). Raw materials purchased from Macedonia were manufactured using cheap Macedonian labour and the finished products were sold back to the Macedonians at a profit.

A Macedonian could not rise above his tyrannical existence on his own because every time he did he was either killed for his education, robbed of his wealth, kicked out of his home for his lands, murdered for defending his family or humiliated for his existence. This is not what Macedonians wanted for themselves, but those powerful enough refused to help them. The Greek clergy who were responsible for the well being of the Macedonian people were the first to condemn them. Their first priorities were to Hellenize them so that they could steal their lands. The Greeks, with their "superior attitude", despised the Macedonians because of their race (the Slavs were the enemy) and because of their agrarian abilities (which the Greeks loathed).

The Super Powers, in their zeal to dominate the Balkans, found themselves at odds with each other and by 1878 were either content with "doing nothing" or stifled by frustration and "turned their backs" on the mess they created. Turkey, for the West was the goose that kept on laying golden eggs.

No excuses or apologies from the English and the French can make up for unleashing Turkey and Hellenism on Macedonia after 1878. No Macedonian, or any human being, for that matter, should ever forgive the Western Powers for putting profit ahead of human life and intentionally turning their backs on the Macedonian people.

Labeling people "Slav" and "Barbarian" because they were not educated does not make them inhuman and certainly does not excuse the "civilized" western societies for tormenting them. Here is what Petrovska has to say. "It is erroneous to dismiss peasant culture as backwards, simply because they are not literate cultures. Indeed the opposite is the case. Children were educated by way of story telling and folklore, which contained morals and lessons about life, relationships and their places in the world" (page 167, Children of the Bird Goddess). (If you want to learn more about life in Macedonia read Kita Sapurma and Pandora Petrovska's book entitled "Children of the Bird Goddess", an oral history that spans over 100 years and explores the lives of four generations of Macedonian women.)

One has only to examine Macedonian traditions, customs, dress, folklore, and attitude towards life to find an "old race" full of vigour, enduring hardships, living as it always lived close to nature, always craving everlasting peace. Macedonian songs are timeless records of sorrow and of hope that "someday this too will pass". Macedonians have survived to this day because they have a caring quality and a capacity to give and forgive, never wanting anything in return. Anyone who has visited a Macedonian home or has lived among Macedonians can attest to that.

Macedonia had done no ill against any nation to deserve her punishment from the Turks and the Greeks. Macedonians did not desire to be labeled "barbarian Slavs" or choose to be illiterate. It was "pure prejudice" on the part of Western Societies that degraded the Macedonian people to barbarian status and created the conditions for the Turks and the Greeks to abuse them. The West's artificial creation of Greece and Hellenism and the Greek quest for purity and national homogeneity is what upset the "natural balance" in the Balkans. Macedonia, since Alexander's time, has been a "worldly" nation and has maintained her multi-ethnic, multi-cultural pluralistic character. If you take the Turks out of Macedonia in the 19th century you will find a society of many nations working and living together in peace, each doing what comes naturally. Anyone who has lived in Macedonia can attest to that. It has always been "outsiders" who shifted the balance and disturbed the peace in the Balkans. While Western Europe slept through her "dark ages", the people of the Balkans lived in relative harmony for over 1,100 years. Each

race played an important role in maintaining the social and political balance and the economic self-sufficiency of the region.

During the 19th century almost all Macedonians lived in village communities. There were no Greeks living in the Macedonian mainland and only a small minority lived in the coastal towns, islands, and larger cities. The majority of the villages were Macedonian with the odd Vlach village nestled here and there in the mountains. Macedonians spoke the Macedonian language and lived an agrarian life working the lands. Among the Macedonians lived some Vlachs who spoke both Vlach and Macedonian. Their main occupation was retail trade, running the local grocery stores and retail businesses. In addition to the Vlachs, were the roving Romas (Gypsies) who traveled from village to village trading their wares. They traded pack animals like horses, mules and donkeys, repaired old and sold new flour sifters, loom reeds, and other fine crafts. They bartered with the village women and traded beads, string and sewing needles for beans and walnuts. To those who could afford it, they sold silk kerchiefs, handmade baskets, and purses. With those who couldn't afford them, they traded their wares for vegetables, eggs, and a few bales of hay. Among themselves the Gypsies spoke their Gypsy dialect but with their customers they spoke Macedonian.

Another race that frequented the Macedonian landscape were the panhandlers from Epirus and Thessaly who performed magic on old copper pots and pans and made spoons and forks shine like mirrors. In addition to their own language, they too spoke Macedonian and were open to bartering for their wares and services.

Carpenters, stone masons, barrel makers, and woodcutters came from far and wide. They came from as far as Albania or as close as the poorest Macedonian village. For a fair wage, some rakija (alcohol spiced with anise during distillation), and three meals a day, they built fences, porches, staircases, and entire houses. For the Macedonians, the soil provided most of life's necessities. The rest was bought, traded or bartered for.

The only desire Macedonians had in the 19th century was to rid themselves of the tyranny of the oppressive Turks. This was most evident in the communique's, appeals, and manifesto's of the legendary Macedonia Revolutionary Committee.

While Macedonia was being choked by the Turkish noose of oppression, tormented by Hellenism, and frustrated by Bulgarian deception, the Greek army, in 1881, annexed Thessaly and in 1885 the Bulgarian army (with Russia's support) annexed Eastern Rumelia. While the Ottoman Empire was crumbling at the edges, it was tightening its grip ever harder on Macedonia. Looting, burning homes and murders were on the rise. More and more Macedonians were made homeless and forced to become outlaws. The brave ones took up arms and fought back only to see that their actions caused more deaths and misery. The Turks and their Albanian allies didn't care who they killed. If one Turk or Albanian died in battle, the army took revenge on the next village they encountered. Thousands of innocent women and children were murdered in revenge killings, not to mention the assaults on countless young girls. Homes were burned down and the inhabitants were shot as target practice as they ran out to save themselves from the fire. Those too old or sick to move died a horrible, fiery death. Many of the survivors from the burned out villages joined the outlaws in the mountains and as their ranks swelled they began to organize and fight back.

Western Europeans and Russians, on the other hand, were flooding the Ottoman Balkans on vacation, to do business or lend a helping hand as missionaries or relief workers. They enjoyed all the freedoms and privileges as honorary citizens of the Ottoman Empire, under the protection of their country's flag, and paid nothing for the honour bestowed upon them, not even taxes.

It has been said that soon after the Turks conquered Albania, Albanians began to convert to Islam. As Muslims, the Albanians, to a large extent, enjoyed the same privileges and advantages as their conquerors. The advantages of becoming a Muslim as opposed to staying Christian were obvious. Those who wanted to retain title to their lands did not hesitate to convert. In fact many realized that by converting they could amass wealth and increase their own importance at the expense of their Christian neighbours.

By the 19th century, about two-thirds of the Albanians embraced Islam and served in almost every capacity in the Ottoman administration including the Sultan's palace guard. Also by the 19th century a great deal of the Ottoman services became corrupt and self-serving. Being Muslims, the Albanians were protected from prosecution of crimes committed against the Christians. This encouraged them to perform predatory acts like kidnappings for ransom, illegal taxation, extortion, and forceful possession of property.

There are two documented ways, that I have come across, that describe how Albanians of the 19th century came to live in Macedonia, among the Macedonians.

1. To keep the Macedonians in check, the Turks created and strategically positioned Albanian villages inside Macedonia among the Macedonian Villages.
2. By expelling or killing a few families in a Macedonian village, Albanian bandits could claim squatters rights and move in. By the next generation, the children of the squatters would become the "begs" of the village which made them legitimate landowners. Being in charge of the village, they then appointed their own family members and trusted friends into positions of authority like tax farmers and policemen. In this manner, they could rule unchallenged.

Forceful occupation of villages was most prevalent during campaigns in the absence of the Turkish army. When the Turks were sent to fight against Russia in the East or against Napoleon in Egypt, the Albanians sought their chance and moved in unabated. Here is an excerpt from Brailsford's book about the habits of some Albanians. "He will rob openly and with violence but he will not steal...He will murder you without remorse if he conceives that you have insulted him..." (page 224, Macedonia, Its Races and their future).

To be fair, I want to mention that Albanians have their good qualities as well. Brailsford speaks very highly of them when it comes to loyalty and honesty. As I mentioned earlier, under the right conditions, Albanians can peacefully co-exist with other nationalities and be a contributing factor to the wealth of a nation. The Macedonians have always co-existed side by side with Albanians. Also, the Albanians who fought to liberate Greece in Morea did not fight for Hellenism, they fought for the good of all the people of the Balkans, including the Macedonians. There was also that one-third of the Albanian population who remained faithful to Christianity that equally suffered the injustices of the Greek clergy and the Ottoman authorities, that also deserves mentioning.

Macedonia Before 1903

The 1878 Treaty of Berlin set events in motion in the Balkans for the next forty years. The re-appearance of Ottoman soldiers, the worsening economy, and the reign of terror imposed by the Greek clergy was crushing the spirits of the Macedonian people. In the meantime, the economic situation of the Super Powers and the new Balkan States was improving daily. In 1881, the Muhareem Decree gave Europeans complete control of Ottoman finances and trade markets. During the same year the Tsari Grad (Constantinople) Conference of Great Powers agreed to the Greek annexation of Thessaly and Epirus. Later that same year Austria-Hungary agreed to allow Serbia to annex parts of Macedonia in some future time. Four years later Bulgaria, with some Russian help, annexed Eastern Rumelia. While the Western Powers were contemplating the "Eastern Question" and collecting returns from Turkish loans, the new Balkan States were plotting Macedonia's demise. Here is what each of them had to say:

Bulgaria: "Bulgaria's whole future depends on Macedonia, without her our State will be without importance or authority. Solun (Salonika) must be the main port of this State, the grand window to illuminate the entire building. If Macedonia does not belong to us, Bulgaria will never be firmly based".

Greece: "Macedonia is the lung of Greece, without it the rest of Greece would be condemned to death. For Greece to become a greater power she must expand into Macedonia."

Serbia: "We are ready to enter into any combination if necessary in order to prevent the Macedonian Question being settled in any way that harms our vital interests, without which Serbia cannot survive".

In addition to being handed back to the Turks, the 1878 Treaty of Berlin now subjected Macedonia to three new tyrants. In time, Macedonia would be subjected to all kinds of evil but the most cunning would turn out to be Bulgarian chauvinism. The Macedonian people knew very well where they stood with the Greeks. Greek policies were straightforward, Hellenize everyone by any means possible, force and brutality included. The Bulgarian approach was very different. The Bulgarians were interested in educating the Macedonian masses into believing that they were Bulgarians. Anyone who showed any opposition didn't live to tell about it. And so became the legacy of so many educated Macedonian young men.

Earlier I explained, with ample evidence, that Greece was a "Western creation" to achieve two objectives. One, to keep Russia out of the Mediterranean Sea and two, to break up the Ottoman occupied Slav lands into small, nationally divergent, easily manageable, and loyal states (a solution to the "Eastern Question"). Created by the Western Powers, the new Balkan States would be loyal to their creator; British politicians were counting on it. The Western powers introduced "nationalism" in the Balkans as a way of replacing the Ottoman Empire, not with a single state but with many "divergent" and manageable sized states. Nationalism, however, was not a way with which Balkan people identified before the 19th century. For over 2,300 years the region was without borders and without a sense of national identity. For over 1,800 years, the people in the region lived with "religion as the only unifying force" which brought them together and allowed them to live in peace. Freedom of movement allowed the diverse people to travel anywhere within the empire to settle and mix with other people. So, how does one create "national consciousness" where one does not exist? Ignoring the fact that the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century was a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural pluralistic society, the Western Powers initiated the nation building process anyway. To them, it didn't matter what kind of "nations" they were building, provided that the new nations were a "non-Slav" singular society that agreed to keep Russia out of the Mediterranean. While the Western Powers were trying to break up the Balkans into small and divergent states, Russia was promoting "Panslavism" to unite all the Slavs under Russian leadership.

The national awakening of Serbia was an accident that couldn't be helped, but Greece was created by design. Greece was the opposite of Serbia and a solution for keeping the balance of power in the Balkans. While Serbia was destined to become a Slav State, Greece would be destined to become the "opposite". The name "Greece" was chosen to denote a "Latin" lineage, to represent the Latin "Romaos" (Roman) character of the people. The name "Hellas" was later chosen by Hellenized Phanariots to denote a lineage from the old City States of antiquity. Both of these names were foreign to the 19th century Balkans, but ideal to reflect the character of the new State. The pre-19th century Phanariots had no notion of nationalism or knowledge of the Ancient City States. Their aim was to drive the Turks out of the Empire and keep the Empire intact so that they could rule it themselves. But this was not what the Western Powers wanted. The process of Hellenization began by educating some Phanariots about the existence of the old City States and their exploits. Phanariots who studied abroad, London in particular, were seduced by the eloquently written, romantic stories about a people that lived at the bottom of the Balkans a long time ago. Phanariots were especially thrilled when they were received by Westerners as the descendents of those Ancient people. Not all Phanariots were Hellenized or convinced to take the Hellenic road, some still wanted to re-create the Byzantine Empire ("Megali Idea") but the West gave them no such choice.

It was one thing to "create a nation" and another to "give it life and a past". The idea of modeling the new Greece after the old City States was well received but lacked continuity. No one could explain how the Greeks progressed from the old City States to the present, pre-19th century history has no record of it. There was no Greek culture and no Greek language that would tie the Modern Greek to the old City State citizen. With some creative imagination and a lot of convincing, the problem was solved. Ancient history was "re-engineered" to fit the modern Greek model. Yes, read your (fake) classical history and learn how the Mighty Macedonian Empire was "Hellenized", not by a powerful race, not by super intelligent beings, but by "the vanquished and subjugated" people of the old City-States. Alexander the Great, the most hated man of the old City-States, the King who wiped out Corinth, and brutally crushed

the spirits of the old City-State citizens, is now the "Great King of the Greeks" whom they revere and hold in such high honor. What hypocrisy!!!

Altering classical history to say that the Ancient Macedonians were Hellenized, does not explain how and why there are "Slavs" all over the Balkans today. Thousands of years of Slav influence and culture could not be easily erased, but thanks to the ingenuity of the Western mind that problem too was solved. When the Westerners began to write the new "Greek" history, they quickly discovered that there was no continuity to tie the Modern Greeks to the Ancient City-States. Ancient Macedonia extinguished all the City-State cultures when she annexed them. The only continuity from the City-States to the Roman era was through Ancient Macedonia. Only through a Hellenized Ancient Macedonia could modern writers claim continuity for the Greeks. It was there and then that the "history revisionists" decided to KILL Macedonia in order to keep Greece alive. There is NO Greece without Macedonia! If Greece is to live then she must inherit everything that was Macedonian. Even after that, however, there was still the "Slav problem". The Slavs were always in the way of Greek Nationhood and for these reasons the "Real Macedonians" became and still are Greece's worst enemy. The Greek zeal to become "who they cannot be" was transformed into jealousy and hatred for Macedonia and her people. From the outset, the Greek State deliberately chose Macedonia and the Macedonian people as "the enemy" as is so often eloquently put and without hesitation announced for the world to hear. Again, thanks to the ingenuity and brilliance of the western mind, the Slav problem for Greece was solved with the creation of "Bulgaria". "What is not Greek must be Bulgarian, what is not Bulgarian must be Greek, there is no such thing as Macedonian", are words echoed to this day. This is what Macedonians faced and must face, lived and must live, every day of their lives both at home and abroad from the 19th century to this day.

The 19th century creation of Bulgaria was the "answer" to covering up all remaining evidence of the existence of a Macedonia outside of the "Hellenic model". Never scientifically proven, the so-called "Slav invasions" were concocted to cover up thousands of years of Macedonian culture and influence in the Balkans (and beyond). Modern history, without scientific proof, claims that the Ancient Macedonians died off (mysteriously to the last one) and were replaced by the "newcomer Slavs". It was later declared that the Slavs living in Macedonia were actually Bulgarians of sorts.

To divide the Bulgarians from the Slav fold and to show that they were a distinct society, different from other Slavs (such as the Serbs), the non-Balkan name "Bulgaria" was chosen to represent a Balkan State created for the first time in the 19th century. The name "Bulgaria" is derived from the river "Volga, allegedly where the Bulgarians came from. We are also led to believe that the Bulgarians were descendents of a small Tartar/Turkish tribe that invaded the region a long time ago and were assimilated by the Slavs. So according to Western sources, Bulgarians are not exactly pure Slavs or pure Tartar/ Turk but a mix of both, enough to make them different from other Slavs and enough to divide them from the Slav fold. Being part Slav, Bulgarians could lay claim to the "Slav speaking residents of Macedonia" on account that they too were Slav. Being part Tartar/Turk and a descendent of the "Volga" made the Bulgarians newcomers in their own land. Thus being newcomers to the Balkans, the Bulgarians could not lay claim to the heritage of Ancient Macedonia. Bulgarians, however, could lay claim to items that did not fit the Hellenic model like the Modern Macedonian (Slav) Culture and language. If you wish to learn more about the above you will find useful information in George Macaulay Trevelyan's book "British History in the Nineteenth Century (1782 - 1901)", Longmans 1927.

After 1878, while the Macedonian economy was crashing down by leaps and bounds, the Bulgarian economy was improving dramatically. This was partly due to the cheap labour provided by a large influx of Macedonian pechalbari (migrant workers). Experiencing a very different life in Sofia, in contrast to life in the village, many Macedonian pechalbari were seduced into believing the Bulgarian propaganda (Macedonians are Bulgarians).

After 1878, the first Macedonians to take up arms were those who were wronged and wanted to see justice done. Soon however, they realized that their efforts were futile and their revenge only resulted in the loss of innocent lives (relatives and neighbours were punished for their crimes, sometimes by death). Macedonian leaders came to the conclusion that what they truly wanted could only be achieved if the Turks were expelled from Macedonia for good.

It was the charismatic humanitarian William Gladstone, a three time British Prime Minister, who uttered the words "Macedonia for the Macedonians" which rang out like loud church bells throughout Macedonia. "Macedonia for the Macedonians" was the signal that rallied the Macedonians into action and gave them hope that finally the West would support their cause. In spite of his great sympathy for the Macedonian people, unfortunately, Gladstone was not in a position to help. The best the Super Powers could offer were "reforms". A great number of reforms were drafted and agreed upon but never implemented. The Turkish Pashas continued to humour the Westerners with reams of fictional statistics and accomplishments, while the Begs (feudal lords) continued to dominate the "Chiflik" (estates) and squeeze the village peasants out of their existence. The only visible reforms were rail and road improvements sponsored by western companies who were able to divert Ottoman finances from the state budgets. Peasants who owned land were taxed so excessively that they had to work on Sunday at road and bridge building to catch up on back taxes. To get such a job they had to resort to bribery. As if that was not enough, in 1889, re-imposing a personal tax of seven shillings per year for each newborn son further increased the tax burden. This was only reduced when the boy was able to work, at age fifteen. Some of these taxes were raised to assist small-scale manufacturing, which was largely owned by foreign investors. Village peasants were forced to sell their most valued possessions, hand-made crafts, old coins, and heirlooms, for next to nothing, to pay for these taxes.

To further aggravate the situation, lawless acts by the Turkish authorities, without any avenue for appeal, contributed to the oppressive climate in the villages. In addition to pillaging, Turkish soldiers now plundered the farms and villages for their daily sustenance. The Turkish administration was in such disarray that suppliers of the military were not paid for long periods of time and were refusing to feed the army. To counter the plundering, peasant militias began to form but were soon outlawed by the Turkish authorities.

By late 1890, those Macedonians who had land couldn't afford to work it because of high taxes and frequent raids. Those who worked for the Begs were at the mercy of their landlord without rights or legal recourse. The courts were clearly working against the Macedonians and beyond "external intervention" there was no way to challenge their tyrannical authority. Though the land was fertile, there was no incentive to work. Agrarian life became a burden, filling village life with hopelessness and crushing the spirit of the Macedonian peasant. Many Macedonian men left their families and turned to pechalbarstvo (migrant work), travelling to various foreign countries in search of work but often returning home poorer due to high travel and lodging expenses. It was during these times that large emigrant Macedonian communities began to form in cities like Sofia, Paris, London, etc. Besides migrant workers, young Macedonian men also traveled abroad to pursue a higher education. They too became involved in the growing Macedonian worker communities. By the late 1890's over 100,000 Macedonian men were working or studying outside of Macedonia. Cafe conversations dominated by discussions of "what to do to improve the situation at home" became commonplace. It was clear to many that the discontentment they were experiencing was not a local or village issue, but a matter that enveloped all of Macedonia. It was also clear that Turkey would not allow Macedonia to protect herself or Turkish courts to rule in Macedonia's favour. It became clear to all that the only option open to a Macedonian was outright rebellion, a rebellion that would have common purpose, tactical mobilization, and central direction. There were many lessons to be learned from the great deeds and disasters of the American war of Independence, the French Revolution, and others. By the late 1890's, Turkish tyranny was not the only ill in Macedonia. There was also the process of Hellenization, Greek propaganda, and the Greek clergy to contend with. Beyond that, there was Bulgarian propaganda that was becoming more venomous by the day.

On another front, escalated Bulgarian activities in Macedonia prompted Greece and Serbia to reconsider an old alliance (1866-67) of restoring ecclesiastical unity under the Patriarch in order to take away from the Exarchate. This alliance, due to Greek greed, for the time did not work out. This, however, would be a prelude to a future and deadlier alliance that would last to this day.

By 1890, the rebellion started to organize and gain momentum. The students were the first to take action. Student revolutionary organizations were formed in Switzerland and Bulgaria. Both used various tactics to combat anti-Macedonian chauvinist Balkan propaganda. Organized in 1891, the group in

Bulgaria allied itself with the organization of Macedonian emigrant workers (Pechalbari) in Sofia and had much success. In time, more organizations sprang up in Russia, Britain, and Greece but none could match the achievements of the Sofia based "Young Macedonian Literary Society" under the tutelage of Petar Pop Arsov. This Society of young Macedonians formulated its own constitution and managed the revolutionary publication "Loza" (Vine). The first issue of Loza came out in January of 1892, followed by six more publications before the Society was denounced by the Greek and Serbian press, and claimed as "its own" by the Bulgarian press. According to official Bulgarian State policy, "Macedonians were Bulgarians" and any worthwhile Macedonian creation belonged to Bulgaria.

While émigré Macedonian students were fighting Greek and Bulgarian propaganda and shoring up Western support, an historic moment inside Macedonia was about to unfold. It was October 23rd, 1893 in Solun (Salonika) when two high school teachers, Damjan Gruev and Anton Dimitrov, together with Petar Pop Arsov, a former editor of Loza and Hristo Tatarchev, a doctor, got together in bookshop owner Ivan Nikolov's house for an informal meeting. The main point of discussion was the plight of the Macedonian people and what to do about it. As word got around a committee was formed, more Macedonians got involved, and a second (formal) meeting was held on February 9th, 1894. The topic of discussion included the drafting of a constitution to guide the committee. By the end of the meeting the committee made the following resolutions:

1. The committee will be revolutionary in nature and will remain secret.
2. Its revolutionary activities will be confined to inside Macedonia's borders.
3. Irrespective of nationality or religion, any Macedonian can become a member of the committee.

The committee also set the following objectives for itself, which were later ratified at the first Revolutionary Congress held in Resen in August 1894:

1. Destroy the Ottoman social system.
2. Remain an "independent" organization.
3. Seek Macedonian autonomy.

The organization became known as Vnatrezhna (Internal) Makedonska (Macedonian) Revolutsionerna (Revolutionary) Organizatsia (Organization), VMRO (IMRO).

Being of clandestine nature, IMRO had some difficulties recruiting new members, but within a year or so its influence extended beyond Solun and into the rest of Macedonia. Initially, the organization was more ideological and less practical, with the majority of its recruits being teachers, most of whom taught at the Exarchate schools inside Macedonia. To rally the masses the organization needed to educate them and bring them in line with IMRO's objectives. For that, it needed a charismatic leader, who was able to talk to people at their own level and who was free to travel without too much interference from the authorities. The man who answered that call was Gotse Delchev, a man of vision matched by only a few, the father of the Macedonian Revolution and the soul of the movement. (If you want to learn more about the IMRO leadership, you must read Michael Radin's book, *IMRO and the Macedonian Question*).

Gotse was a realist and at the same time an idealist who loved people, hated tyranny, and saw the world as a place of many cultures living together in peace. As a realist, Gotse knew that in order for a revolution to be successful it had to be a "moral revolution" of the mind, heart, and soul of an enslaved people. People needed to feel like people with rights and freedoms and not like slaves. With that in mind Gotse set out to build up a revolutionary conscience in the Macedonian population and thus set the revolutionary wheels in motion. Gotse's installment as undisputed leader of IMRO was consolidated during the Solun Congress of 1896, after which IMRO began to massively organize. Gotse's abilities to "listen and learn" brought him close to the problems of ordinary people who wanted freedom but also wanted to preserve their religion, culture, and way of life. With Gotse's field research in mind, IMRO's strategy was to "give the people what they want" and win them over. Initially, the strategy worked well and won IMRO the support it needed.

By 1896, it was able to exert influence to a point where it acted like a state within a state, taking over administrative positions from the Ottomans, leading boycotts against Ottoman institutions, and offering isolated villages protection from Greek and Bulgarian sponsored brigands. In time, IMRO operatives were able to penetrate Ottoman economic, educational, and even judicial functions. The

downside of "giving the people what they want", opened the doors for Bulgarian infiltration. By "attitude" and use of the Greek language, it was easy to recognize Greek influence. However, Bulgarian influence was not as easily recognized. While the Greeks cared nothing about Macedonian affairs and loathed the Macedonian language, the Bulgarians were a part of Macedonian affairs and spoke the Macedonian language eloquently. By far the largest Bulgarian infiltration into Macedonian affairs took place in Sofia among the pechalbari.

As I mentioned earlier, the cosmopolitan lifestyle in Sofia, a far cry from life in the village, seduced some Macedonians to succumb to Bulgarian propaganda, which resulted in the formation of the "External Macedonian Revolutionary Organization"; better known as the "Supreme Macedonian Committee". This organization was formed in Sofia in March of 1895; called the "Trojan Horse" of IMRO, by Gotse Delchev. The initial membership consisted of emigrant Macedonian nationalists but in time its leadership was infiltrated by officers from the Bulgarian State Army. The objective, on the surface of this "two faced" organization termed "Vrhovist" (Supremacist) by IMRO, was to fight for Macedonia's independence, by armed intervention in an aggressive revolutionary manner. It's true nature, however, (concealed from the people) was to undermine IMRO by subordinating its central committee to its own "Supremacist directives". This, and the fact that Vrhovism masqueraded itself as "Macedonian patriotism" in the eyes of the Macedonian people, very much disturbed Gotse Delchev. True to his nature of keeping an open mind, Delchev, along with Gruev, took a trip to Sofia in hopes of reconciling their differences with the Vrhovists but came back more disillusioned. Instead of receiving a handshake, on March 20th, 1896, Gotse was informed that Bulgaria would no longer support IMRO and all finances and arms would be cut off. From here on forward, the Vrhovists would decide what actions IMRO would take inside Macedonia. This was indeed an attempt by the Vrhovists to usurp control of IMRO. Disappointed but not disillusioned, Gotse turned to "Mother Russia" for assistance, but there too he found no welcome reception. Russia had no interest in helping IMRO because there were no advantages to gain from liberating Macedonia (given Russia's current relationship with the Western Powers).

Due to IMRO's popularity, strength, and ability to recognize a "Trojan Horse", the Bulgarian led organization failed to achieve its true objectives. After that it resorted to violent attacks and assassination attempts with the aim of eliminating the entire IMRO structure and its leadership. It used armed interventions in order to provoke Ottoman reprisals against innocent village peasants and put the blame on IMRO. By selective propaganda and vilifying the Ottomans in the eyes of the world, the Bulgarian led organization was hoping for a Super Power intervention to weaken the Turk and at the same time create a climate for a Bulgarian invasion (disguised as a "liberation" of the oppressed Macedonians).

In the meantime both Delchev and Gruev were promoted to the rank of "District Inspector of Schools" in their employment, enabling them to travel unabated and without suspicion. Using inspection tours as cover, they were able to find ways to purchase and smuggle arms into Macedonia. They also took time to address Macedonian villages and made personal contacts with the village chiefs. Many people flocked to hear what these legendary figures of men, patriots, and saviors had to say. Unfortunately, lecturing out in the open placed IMRO leaders at risk from spies. As a result, on one occasion Gotse was arrested by the Turkish authorities in May of 1896 and spent 26 days in jail. When the Turks couldn't find anything to charge him with, Gotse was released.

Bulgarian influence was not limited to Vrhovist actions alone. Bulgarian undercover agents were dispatched to Solun to spy on IMRO activities and report back to the Bulgarian State. The Exarchate also had policies of its own and continued to rally the Macedonian youth for its own cause. When it seemed like IMRO was unbreakable, the Vrhovists resorted to infiltrating the IMRO leadership itself, which in time brought them some success. Bulgarian interference in IMRO policies caused hardships and internal squabbling between executive committee members and eventually caused the organization to split into hostile factions. This undermined IMRO's credibility with the outside world. The Vrhovists badly wanted to provoke Turkey so that they could "liberate" Macedonia, but the Super Powers, especially Russia and Britain "didn't buy it" and saw their actions as provocative and dangerous. While the Vrhovist leadership agreed to curb its provocative actions, its armed wing of insurgents, however, had already penetrated and captured parts of Eastern Macedonia. Even though the invasion lasted about two days, it became clear as

to "who was who" and the true Vrhovist agenda was exposed. After that IMRO gave the Vrhovists a stern warning to "stay out of Macedonia". To use Delchev's words, "Whoever works for the unification with Greece or Bulgaria is a good Greek or Good Bulgarian but NOT a good Macedonian." After that, while IMRO worked for a "Macedonia for the Macedonians" the Bulgarian Supreme Committee openly worked for a "Macedonia for the Bulgarians". IMRO leadership strove to purify IMRO from the Vrhovist infiltration. In essence, the IMRO constitution was bolstered to exclude Vrhovist demands but was still able to give the Macedonian people what they wanted. The IMRO leadership, without much success, made attempts to infiltrate and sabotage the Vrhovist Supreme Committee by making frequent trips to Sofia and attempting to rally dissident emigrant forces inside Bulgaria.

While the Vrhovists were plotting against IMRO and the Macedonian people from the north, a new menace was brewing from the south. On April 9th, 1897 armed Greek bands began to aggressively cross into Macedonia. The Turks protested this action to the Super Powers but the Greeks denied responsibility, insisting all along that it was the Macedonian Cheti. It wasn't long before the Turks took the offensive and drove the Greeks out of Thessaly. When the Turks were about to overtake the entire country the Super Powers intervened on Greece's behalf to once again save her. The Greek Government, in charge of the invasion, fell out of grace and, when a new Government was elected, agreed to pay a hefty fine, which consisted of four million Turkish pounds, as well as giving up Thessaly to the Turks. In addition to losing grace, Greece had to relinquish control of her own finances (to the Super Powers) to ensure prompt payment of the fine. The Super Powers, without German support, forced the Sultan to accept the offer and sign a peace deal. The Germans never forgave the Greeks for lying to them about their aggressive actions against the Turks. The Germans at that time were responsible for Turkey. Outside of Greek brigand actions, for the moment at least, Greece was not a direct threat to IMRO.

IMRO demonstrated great leadership by its ability to organize Macedonia into seven revolutionary districts (Solun, Serres, Strumitsa, Shtip, Skopje, Bitola, and Endrene {Macedonian Dardanelles}). It also demonstrated its weaknesses. Having allied itself with the poor village peasants and striving to refrain from obligations and debts, IMRO found itself strapped for finances. The IMRO committee was unable to raise all the necessary funds to finance its campaigns. While the leadership turned a blind eye, the local commanders resorted to kidnapping rich landowners, merchants, and foreign dignitaries for ransom. Kidnappings did not exclude foreign missionaries, like Miss Stone, who fell into the hands of Sandanski's Cheta (armed bands). Taken by the plight of her captors, Miss Stone voluntarily made sure the ransom was paid in full. Short of finances, mostly due to unfriendly terms with the Vrhovist Supreme Command in Sofia, IMRO found itself lacking the necessary arsenal to wage war. Subordination to Bulgarian demands was out of the question so Gotse had to look elsewhere to get his weapons. Efforts were made to purchase weapons from Greece, Albania, and even from the Turks themselves but without too much success. By 1897, the situation was getting desperate so the IMRO leadership resorted to purchasing from the black market, even stealing weapons. One such purchase was made from the Bulgarian Military. The military allowed the sale of outdated guns but later refused to sell cartridges, fearing the weapons might be turned against them. On October 1900, Chakalarov, a local chief in the Lerin/Kostur regions who spoke Greek, dressed up as an Albanian pretending to be from Ianitsa, was successful in purchasing some arms from Athens. Later attempts by others, however, were not so successful. On one occasion, a translator betrayed the purchasers to the Turkish consul on the advice of a Greek priest. After that the Turks trusted this translator and made him a sergeant in their gendarme. He served the Turks well and brought them much success in their "search and destroy" missions, until he discovered he could make even more money by taking bribes before turning people in. As a result of this man's actions many band members, from many villages, were killed.

The lack of sufficient arms brought home the realization that this "uprising" was going to be a long one. Here again, Gotse and the IMRO leadership proved their worth by adopting a policy of self-arming. With a little bit of skill on weapons manufacture, learned from the Armenian Revolutionaries, IMRO set up a number of munitions factories in remote and secluded areas, capable of producing homemade bombs and other explosives. Unfortunately, in 1900 during a raid at one of these factories, Dame Gruev was arrested by the Turkish authorities and imprisoned in Bitola. He came back to active

duty in April 1903. In spite of all efforts made to obtain them, the Macedonian "Cheti" lacked arms but had plenty of courage to make up for it, which in time put fear in the Turkish hearts. As IMRO grew beyond its ideological stage, it began to recruit, equip, and train fighters. Volunteers were recruited mainly from the villages, young men who were willing to fight for their freedom. Those who were in trouble with the law (brigands) were armed and recruited into active duty. Those were men who flourished by attacking Turks and stealing from them. They were admired for their courage and ability to live free. They were men who practiced the art of war, knew how to live in the open, how to ambush, and how to hide. They were the men who taught the young Macedonian recruits to fight and win. The rest were reservists and lived at home, only called to duty as required. Each reservist was expected to purchase and secure his own rifle and ammunition. Recruitment was carried out in utmost secrecy. Even women were enlisted in the Macedonian revolution, but their role was limited to cooking, washing, mending, and nursing the wounded.

The primary role of a fighter was to defend the people from Turkish and brigand attacks. The Cheti consisted of about five to ten men, organized for rapid mobilization and quick response. The goal was to have one Cheta responsible for one village (preferably their own) in all of Macedonia. The leader of each Cheta was chosen for his abilities to lead his men, and more so, for the peoples' confidence in him to protect their village. To respond quickly, the Cheta had to be familiar with the village's terrain and escape routes. To maintain secrecy, all orders were given by word of mouth.

The IMRO mobilization managed to elude the Turkish authorities for a long time. However, an unfortunate discovery of some explosives accidentally uncovered the secret and led the Turkish militia on wide "search and destroy" missions. The militia's conduct, unfortunately, was less than honourable when the soldiers began torturing innocent people and burning properties in order to obtain confessions. The Cheti's responsibility was to ambush the militia, using guerrilla tactics, before they entered villages and prevent them from doing harm. This, however, did not always work so some of the Cheta Chiefs resorted to retaliations and reprisals for crimes already committed. Although poorly armed and vastly undermanned (sometimes as high as 10 Turks to 1 Macedonian), the Cheti fought fierce battles and gained legendary reputations among both the Turks and the Macedonians. Unfortunately, as the Ottoman authorities became more aware of IMRO's intentions the Turkish militias began to swell with soldiers. If that was not enough, at about the same time the Exarchate, suspecting IMRO affiliation, began to dismiss Macedonian teachers on mass. Even though most Macedonian teachers despised working for the Exarchate, they used the schools as a means of promoting IMRO's aims. They frequently gave lectures, taught Macedonian patriotic songs, canvassed house to house etc. This was a blow to IMRO. A more severe blow however, came in April of 1897 in what was termed the "Goluchowski-Muraviev Agreement". This was an agreement drawn up by Tsar Nikolai II of Russia and Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria regarding the future of the remainder of the Ottoman Empire. In part, the agreement stated that, at some future time, the Macedonian territory would be divided equally between Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria. In other words, when the Super Powers got their fill of Turkey and abandoned her, Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria were welcome to take their turn. This indeed was bad news and, as history showed, it was devastating for IMRO and disastrous for the Macedonian people.

In about 1898, the Bulgarian Exarchate, instructed by the Bulgarian Prime Minister, created a Vrhovist organization inside Macedonia. Based in Solun, known as the "Revolutionary Brotherhood", it in turn began to form its own Cheti. While pretending to be part of IMRO, the purpose of this organization was to carry out terrorist activities and, in the eyes of the world, discredit the real IMRO. By the year 1900, IMRO's enemies were growing in numbers and intensifying in ferocity. IMRO's woes were just beginning when they discovered that the Vrhovists had dispatched six assassins to murder Delchev and Sandanski (a legendary Cheta chief affectionately known as the "Tsar of Pirin"). The Vrhovist Cheti were raining terror on Macedonian villages provoking the Turks to act. Although never proven, it was alleged that the Vrhovist leaders were working with the Turks in successfully arresting members of IMRO, destroying munitions depots, and torturing, raping, and murdering people. Even the Turks themselves participated in sabotage tactics. Several Greek spies were killed at one time and IMRO was blamed. As a result of this many organizers were rounded up and arrested. In reality, however, it was

Turkish Begs who committed the crimes as was later discovered. The same Begs were seen attacking Turkish tax collectors. Failing to assassinate Delchev and Sandanski, the six assassins, in frustration, turned to attacking people, burning down villages, stealing money and claimed it to be the work of IMRO. Several important leaders, including the famous "Marko Lerinski" (the "Tsar of Lerin"), Cheta leader of the Lerin and Kostur Regions, was killed in these attacks.

All was not lost, however, during the next attack. Sandanski was ready for the Vrhovists and in September 1902, sent them packing. The Turks did the rest by crushing the Vrhovist remnants in November of the same year. The disturbances and civil strife were enough to convince Turkey that yet another uprising may be imminent and that she should take action to prevent it. As usual, violence was answered with more violence. The Turks initiated a wide campaign of "search and destroy" missions, exacting serious retributions and terror on the village populations. In addition to regular Turkish troops, the Ottomans now enlisted reserves from the Albanian Muslim fold. Every bridge, railway cutting, and railway tunnel was guarded. Also, every village had a garrison of ten or more troops guarding it. While the Turkish troops were content with "fighting it out" with the Cheti then retiring to their barracks, the Albanian reservists avoided direct confrontations and preferred to join the Bashi-Bazouks (armed civilian Muslims) in pillaging and plundering the villages. These gendarmes, recruited from the Albanian Gheg Muslim community, had a vested interest in disorder. The gendarmes allowed law-breakers to exist so that they could keep their employment. They rarely engaged in combat and their meager pay was always in arrears so they readily accepted bribes to make their living. Both the Patriarchate and Exarchate were known to bribe the gendarmes in order to allow Greek and Bulgarian brigands to function freely.

To make a bad situation worse, at the end of August 1902, the Vrhovists showed up in Macedonia uninvited and began to issue orders directly to the local chiefs to start the rebellion. According to Vrhovist plans the rebellion was ordered to begin September 20th, 1902. This was news to IMRO. This latest bold Vrhovist action turned a lot of heads, including that of Vasil Chakalarov. Chakalarov was a respected chief and managed to sway the people away from the Vrhovists. But the Vrhovists were not finished and began to publicly accuse Chakalarov and others of being cowards and peasants for not wanting to fight. When that still didn't work, Chakalarov was personally called a thief, allegedly having stolen a fortune from the Vrhovist money, allocated for purchasing arms. Fortunately the Macedonian people knew that Chakalarov was a decent man. They also knew that the Vrhovists didn't contribute any funds for purchasing arms. Left alone, unable to start the rebellion, the Vrhovists tucked their tails and went elsewhere to cause trouble.

This latest Vrhovist action did not go unnoticed by the Turks and put IMRO in a difficult situation. The Vrhovists had wanted to get IMRO into a fight with the Turkish army, for a long time, but so far were unsuccessful. This time, unfortunately, their wishes were about to come true. The Vrhovists believed that a fight with IMRO would weaken Turkey enough to make a Bulgarian invasion possible. They encouraged the Cheti Chiefs to "start the insurrection and Bulgaria would finish it" for them. "Bulgaria has hundreds of thousands of troops standing by and will come to your rescue as soon as the first shot is fired," is what the Vrhovists were preaching to the Macedonian chiefs.

IMRO knew that its fighters were not ready for a frontal attack with the Turkish militia. They also knew that, fight or not, the Turkish militia was going to destroy Macedonia village by village, one way or another. The Vrhovists on the other hand, could not be trusted for their help because they had no intention of honouring their promises. Their actions had made that point very clear in the past. In either case, IMRO had no choice but to act soon. The "search and destroy" missions were putting many innocent people in jeopardy including women and children. Local informants, Greek, and Bulgarian brigands did not hesitate to inform on the villages, especially if they had an axe to grind. On many occasions, Patriarchate and Exarchate brigands (hired goons) were put out of action by the Cheti and that made their benefactors angry, who in turn informed on the villages. Brigands were hired to harass and exact terror on villagers to sway them to change allegiance from one church to another. The Cheti were fierce fighters and fought gallantly when it came to protecting their villages but were undermanned and poorly armed. As much as they wanted to, they were not capable of always standing up to the large and well-equipped Turkish militia. The militia on the other hand, did not always operate under the best of ethics and was

open to bribes. The poor people who couldn't afford bribes fared the worst. Some say it was less of a punishment to produce a rifle than not to have one at all. Some resorted to purchasing rifles and turning them in just so that they received a lesser punishment. On many occasions the houses of those suspected of aiding the Cheta were burned to the ground. The Turks did not even hesitate to jail old women accused of that crime. Historical accounts show that during the height of the search and destroy activities; the jails in Macedonia were filled beyond capacity. In fact, a Solun jail, with a capacity for 500, was holding 900 prisoners (some were held in the White Tower). There is an old Macedonian saying: "There is nothing worse than being locked up in a Turkish jail."

On January 31st, 1903, the Turks declared IMRO illegal and sought ways to destroy it. This bad news for IMRO gave the Vrhovists the necessary momentum they needed to become a wedge between those in IMRO, who wanted an immediate uprising and those who believed that an uprising at this point in time was suicidal. Gotse Delchev was against this "willing sacrifice" and was hoping to find a better solution, but time was running out.

A second Solun Congress, dominated by the Vrhovists, was staged in February of 1903. Delchev and most of IMRO's loyal supporters did not attend. A resolution was reached, but not ratified by the regional committees, that an uprising would take place on Ilinden, on the 2nd of August 1903. To weaken the Turks, the Vrhovists staged a number of bombings and terrorist acts. The Solun to Tsari Grad railway was bombed on March 18th, as was the Solun Ottoman, bank a month later. This did not weaken the Turks, as expected, but instead brought more Turkish troops into Macedonia and further escalated the violence against innocent civilians. If that was not enough, the sudden rise in violence against Ottoman institutions was not well received by European investors and businessmen, who saw Ottoman Macedonia as a safe place to invest. The few lonely voices in London, calling for Macedonian support, were quickly drowned out by the many voices of discontent calling for the demise of the terrorists.

Tragically, the Turks killed Gotse Delchev in Banitsa on May 3rd, 1903 a day after the IMRO Smilevo Congress had started. Termed the Bitola Congress, the purpose of the Smilevo Congress was to review the resolutions from the Vrhovist dominated Solun Congress, held earlier in the same year. Damjan Gruev (a native of Smilevo) chaired the Congress and tried hard to present the situation realistically by arguing for and against an early uprising. When the matter was put to a vote, however, the majority declared themselves in favour of an uprising. With these words, "better an end with horrors than horrors without end" Gruev also voted in support of the Ilinden rebellion. From here on there was no turning back. A general staff was elected, with Gruev as the head, and preparations for the uprising began. In due time plans were made, a military strategy prepared, weapons, medical supplies and food-stuffs were requisitioned and stock piled, Cheta were organized, and training drills were performed. On July 26th, 1903, by a dispatch to the Great Powers via the British vice-consul in Bitola, the General Staff formally announced the uprising. Then on July 28th, 1903, IMRO dispatched mounted couriers to all the sub-districts with the message "let the uprising begin". On the same day the General Staff informed the Ottoman Director of Railways to warn travelers to choose a different mode of transportation in order to avoid being hurt. Despite the odds, the brave people of Macedonia heroically rose to the task with valour. They knew well that the fight they were forced to fight might not bring them what they wanted. They chose to fight anyway because it was a fight for freedom and freedom after centuries of slavery was valued above life itself. That, however, did not convince the Super Powers to lend a helping hand. Macedonia, for a second time within a quarter century, was exposed to treachery that would make the 1878 betrayal look like a picnic.

Macedonia and the 1903 Ilinden Aftermath

Before I get into the details of the uprising I would like to make a few points very clear. Many village civilians died in the aftermath of the 1903 uprising and they were ALL Macedonian. Brailsford in his book, *Macedonia Its Races and their Future*, and Dakin in his book, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*, as well as many other authors provide statistics that show Greek and Bulgarian civilian

casualties. Let me assure you that beyond some high-ranking Greek and Bulgarian clergy (bishops) and consuls, most of whom lived in the larger cities, there were no Greek or Bulgarian civilians living in the Macedonian villages at that time. Everyone who died in the villages was Macedonian. The people who were (forcibly) Hellenized and pledged allegiance to the Greek Orthodox Church were Macedonian. The people who were lured by Bulgarian propaganda and fooled into joining the Bulgarian Orthodox Church were Macedonian. The informants who were killed by the Cheti (Macedonian armed revolutionary bands) were Macedonian. The Greek informants who informed on the Exarchists were Macedonian. The Bulgarian informants who informed on the Patriarchists were Macedonian. The Patriarchate priests who preached in Greek in the Churches were mostly Macedonian. The teachers who taught Greek in the Patriarch sponsored schools were mostly Macedonian. The Exarchate priests who preached Old Church Slavonic in the Churches were Macedonian. The teachers who taught Bulgarian in the Exarchate sponsored schools were Macedonian. Even some of the Patriarchate and Exarchate sponsored hoodlums and brigands were mostly Macedonian.

What makes this sad affair bizarre is that while Macedonians were dying, at the hands of the Turk, Albanian, Greek, and Bulgarian armed bands, the Greeks were falsifying statistics claiming the victims to be Greek and Bulgarian. Since there were no Greek or Bulgarian civilians living in the Macedonian villages then there could be no Greek or Bulgarian victims. Brailsford, Dakin, and others obtained their information through "politically correct" official channels. Unfortunately, the politically correct official channels were quoting biased and unchallenged Greek propaganda sources, which supported the Greek interests and the Greek political point of view. There were no official channels to represent Macedonian interests or the Macedonian point of view.

The Macedonian people were exploited by the Turks and the Europeans and despised for complaining. They were forcibly Hellenized then profaned for not being model Hellenes. They were punished by the Bulgarians for accepting Hellenism then forcibly Bulgarized. Those Bulgarized, were then violated and murdered by the Greeks for switching allegiance. Such was the fate of the Macedonians greeted by the 20th century. But this was only the beginning, for a new force, Serbian chauvinism, was about to be unleashed.

It was dawn August 2nd, 1903 and the men could see their breath in the cool, still morning mountain air. Darkness was finally giving way to dawn. Not a soul had slept all night. The fervour and business of the night before had died down. There was only silence now as darkness slowly yielded to dawn and each man reconciled his thoughts and comforted his fears. The stillness was interrupted by what seemed like a thunderbolt, when the Cheta chief soberly announced, "It's time." Like Olympic sprinters, the men rose to their feet ignoring the stiffness of the long night's motionless rest. Hearts pounding, they picked up their gear and rifles and began the descent down the mountain towards the chiflicks (estates) below. It was still dark and there was no one in sight. The men crept up on the barracks in silence. The chief motioned with his hand and the men quickly scattered and took their positions. The barracks were now surrounded. When a guard inside the barracks stepped out, the crackle of rifle fire broke the silence of the new day. The black smoke of gunpowder greeted the first rays of the sun and the cries of the wounded disturbed the serenity of the morning stillness. It was August 2nd, 1903, Ilinden, a new dawn for the Macedonian people.

By midday the Western Region of Macedonia was on fire as church bells rang, rifles crackled, and bellowing smoke enveloped mountains and valleys alike. Five thousand strong had assembled to show their distaste for Turkish rule. They had no cavalry and no artillery except for a few cannons, made of cherry wood, which were more dangerous to them than to the enemy, but they had faith, spirit, and trust in each other. They were the Macedonian Komiti (freedom fighters).

Following Damjan Gruev's orders from Smilevo, the village Cheti combined forces to form the following: the Smilevo and Gjavato Region Cheta (650), the Krushovo Region Cheta (400), the Kichevo Region Cheta (350), the Bitola Region Cheta (250), the Ohrid Region Cheta (880), the Resna Region Cheta (450), the Demir-Hisar Region Cheta (420), the Prespa Region Cheta (300), the Kostur Region Cheta (700), and the Lerin Region Cheta (450).

I am proud to say that my own great-grandfather Philip, at age 53, participated in the Ilinden uprising. He was issued a rifle, a single shell, and was told to stand guard at Mount Preol at the entrance to Prespa. At the first sight of the Turkish militia he was required to fire a warning shot to let the Cheta know that the Turks were approaching. He survived his bout and lived to the ripe old age of 92 to tell about it.

The Cheti, under the command of capable leaders such as Damjan Gruev, Vasil Chakalarov, Petar Pop Arsov, Pitu Guli, and others, fared well and enjoyed considerable success in the few weeks before the Turkish militia began to amass. The local villagers also joined the movement giving moral support to the fighters. Even men from other regions that had not yet risen left their homes and came to fight. All in all the Macedonian people possessed the will to fight but lacked the rifles and ammunition with which to do it.

When the rebellion began, as a precaution, most villages were evacuated. People who left the villages took up residence in secluded places up in the mountains. They took with them whatever they could carry and set up camp. Temporary shelters were constructed from tree branches and were covered with vegetation. They fenced their livestock, out of sight, in wooded areas. They even built underground ovens to cook food and bake bread in safety.

Some villages that didn't join the rebellion felt it was unnecessary to evacuate because they posed no threat to the Turks. Residents of one such village, Neokazi near Lerin, stayed home thinking they would be safe. When the Turkish militia passed by they razed the village and turned on the civilian population. Not being satisfied with just burning the village, the Turks summoned about 60 Macedonian men and placed them under arrest. On their way to Lerin the Turks, instead of taking the men to jail, tortured and massacred them in cold blood. Eyewitnesses reported observing the Turks lining the men up in rows and firing at them to see how many one bullet could kill.

Three days later, it was Armensko's turn. After losing a skirmish to Chakalarov, Haireddin Bimbishi's (the butcher of Smrdesh) troops, defeated, angry, and embittered were heading for Lerin when they came across a welcoming committee at Armensko. The priest and other members of the village went out to greet and welcome the Turks. The Turks were not pleased and murdered the welcoming committee on the spot. Bimbishi's men then turned on the defenseless village and pillaged, burned, and satisfied their brutal lust undisturbed. Sixty-eight villagers were massacred and ten women and eight girls were violated. "Several women who managed to crawl out of their burning houses were afterwards caught as they lay dying, and violated repeatedly until they expired" (page 160, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future, taken from page 319 of the "Blue Book").

The Turkish soldiers had orders to burn down all empty villages because it was a sure sign that they belonged to the families of insurgents, and to spare the rest. As it turned out, however, those who didn't join the rebellion and didn't want any trouble not only lost their homes but some even lost their lives. It was a choice between having your village burned or having it burned and being massacred as well. It was a hard lesson learned but it didn't help the sick and bedridden who were burned alive where they lay.

As battles raged on throughout Western Macedonia, the Cheti put down most of the local Turkish garrisons. They destroyed bridges, railway lines and communications centres, captured most chifliks, and briefly liberated some regions such as Kichevo, Demir-Hisar, Kostur, Lerin, Klisoura, and Neveska. The cities of Kostur and Lerin themselves were not liberated. The most successful and highly celebrated of all battles, however, was the storming of the town of Krushevo. Nikola Karev led the Cheti in the attack and defeated the local Turkish garrison with ease. The Macedonians quickly took over the most strategic points like the Post Office, Town Hall, and local Police Station and declared Krushevo liberated. True to their democratic commitments, the leaders of the liberating force constituted the Krushevo assembly which appointed a committee of sixty members, twenty from each of the community's Macedonian, Vlach, and Albanian populations. The committee in turn elected an executive body of six delegates, two from each community, which operated as a provisional government. The government in turn established a financial, judiciary, and police force. "At Krushevo, under the rays of temporary liberty, fraternity and equality, national hatreds were dispelled and peace and concord reigned. For eleven whole days Krushevo

lived as a little independent state, and although in miniature, clothed with flesh and blood that idea which spurred Macedonians to fight, against tyranny up to the Ilinden rising" (page 193, Vasil Bogov, Macedonian Revelation, Historical Documents Rock and Shatter Modern Political Ideology).

True to his socialist ideals Nikola Karev drew up the famous Krushevo manifesto, a document aimed at eliciting support from all the communities including the Muslim Turks and Albanians. (The full text of the Krushevo manifesto is in Michael Radin's book, IMRO and the Macedonian Question, appendix 3B, starting on page 275. It is most inspiring to learn that in spite of what the Turks and Albanians had done to the Macedonian people, the Macedonian leaders still found it within their hearts to show compassion for them.) I also want to add that Brailsford, in his book "Macedonia its Races and their Future", has nothing but praise for the Macedonian Cheti for their more than exemplary conduct during the uprising.

The "Krushevo Republic" unfortunately, lasted only two weeks, but it was a glorious Republic that will forever remind the Macedonian people of their eternal struggle for independence and thirst for freedom. The liberation of Krushevo imprinted on the new Macedonian generations the legacy of a timeless and irreversible march towards self-determination. IMRO came a long way from a group of academics deliberating what to do in the face of repression to delivering, in true revolutionary fashion, a democratic Republic with all the socialist trimmings. Here again, we see the Macedonian desire for multiculturalism and for a new multiethnic society waiting to resurface. The Republic was constituted on a multiracial basis in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the Macedonian people.

Next to Krushevo, Kostur fared second best in the tactical mobilization of the Cheti, under the command of Lazar Pop Trajkov and Vasil Chakalarov. These brigades staged successful raids, liberating Klisura and Neveska, then returned southward and, with the support of over three thousand villagers, attacked Kostur but without success. In the meantime, other Cheti attacked and liberated Ohrid, which remained free for almost three months. The Ohrid attack was the most successful in terms of advance planning and administering the establishment of medical aid, underground workshops, secret bakeries, and securing foodstuffs. Ohrid later became the centre for establishing refugee camps for many displaced persons.

Uprisings outside of Western Macedonia were limited to swift guerilla actions consisting mostly of attacks against Ottoman institutions, bombings of railway lines, and the occasional skirmish with the Turkish militia. Many Cheti were successful in capturing important Turkish officials. They hoped to construct dialogue for prospective negotiations but, in actuality, met with little success. Vrhovist involvement, as expected, was minimal during the uprising and brought to light, once again, the true nature of Vrhovism (Macedonia for the Bulgarians).

As the Cheti fought gallantly putting down garrison after garrison in the larger towns, many of the smaller villages were left unprotected and open to Bashi-bazouk and Turkish militia attacks. Keeping in mind the Neokrazi and Armensko incidents, many of the Cheta chiefs felt compelled to return home to repel such attacks. Due to this and the fact that the numerically superior Turkish militia overpowered the Cheti, in the short term, a large-scale operation against the Turks never materialized. Unfortunately, as time passed so did the opportunity for a decisive strike, as an even larger Turkish force was amassing.

The initial success of the rebellion was a surprise to the Turks especially since Turkish forces were numerically superior to those of the rebels. The Cheti, however, demonstrated their abilities in battle and more than matched the numbers with will. Turkey, unfortunately, was determined to put down the rebellion and amassed additional forces, deploying a total of 167,000 infantry, 3,700 cavalry, and 440 pieces of artillery (all cannons). Krushevo alone was surrounded by 20,000 Turkish troops with 18 cannons against an encircled force of no more than 1,200 rebel fighters. The battle to retake Krushevo began on August 12th with the Macedonians crying out "Sloboda ili Smirt" (liberty or death) against the onslaught of Turkish cannon fire. Pitu Guli and his men fought gallantly. They provided stiff opposition to the Turkish advance but were no match for General Baktiar Pasha. Baktiar was a skilled war veteran who overwhelmed the Cheti by attacking the entire region simultaneously. The region was surrounded by soldiers, encircled by cannon fire, and every Macedonian stronghold within was attacked simultaneously, cutting off all reinforcements and outside support.

After the mountains lit up with gunfire and smoke filled the skies, no Super Powers came to the rescue. Macedonia was left alone to feel the full fury of the Ottoman Empire's army and to pay for all of Europe's sins committed against the Turks. Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria were now free, their freedom guaranteed by the Super Powers. When Greece got into trouble, the Super Powers wasted no time to come to her rescue. Where were the Super Powers when Macedonia needed their help? Why didn't they respond to the cries of the burning villagers? Why didn't they intervene to stop the killing, razing, and pounding? Where was Britain when the European-made Turkish cannons pounded Krushevo to dust?

Once Krushevo fell, one by one other IMRO strongholds began to yield winding down the ten-week-old rebellion. In Krushevo, Baktiar Pasha allowed his troops to kill, pillage, and rape for three days. The town was permanently devastated with 117 civilians murdered, 150 women raped, and 159 houses burned.

In the Ilinden aftermath, according to Radin, in total 4,694 civilians were murdered, 3,122 women raped, 12,440 houses burned, 201 villages razed, 75,835 people left homeless, and about 30,000 people left the country for good becoming permanent refugees (page 105, IMRO and the Macedonian Question). Besides the atrocities committed against the civilian population in Macedonia, the most significant impact of the uprising was the loss of so many great IMRO leaders.

Despite the negative attitudes of the European Governments, there was much press about the Ilinden rebellion. World opinion was generally sympathetic to the Macedonian cause and highly critical of the Ottoman atrocities. Emigrant Macedonians the world over bombarded the Western Press with scathing attacks on the British, French, and Austrian governments for supporting Turkey, militarily and financially. Even emigrants as far as the United States, staged large rallies in support of the rebellion. In New York alone more than 100,000 gathered to show support. A Chicago newspaper reported that a Macedonian regiment had formed in that city and was preparing to take part in the rebellion.

Closer to home, south Slav Nations such as Slovenia and Vojvodina held public meetings in support of the Macedonian Revolution. Even the European press featured sympathetic headlines when covering the rebellion. "It was a bitter struggle between the tortured slaves fighting on masse, often without weapons, but on spirit alone, for life and liberty; and the sadistic Pasha and his cohorts, murdering and plundering with rabidity" (Giorgio Nurigiani). British official policy, however, was less than sympathetic. According to the Daily News, September 14, 1903, Prime Minister Balfour told the House of Commons "...the balance of criminality lies not with the Turks, but with the rebels." The paper was critical of this attitude and recorded the following editorial: "The balance of criminality is surely here in our own land. Britain had denied Macedonia freedom at Berlin, knowing that (continued) Ottoman rule was synonymous with cruelty and tyranny, and by adopting a laissez-faire attitude at the juncture, Britain is a consenting party to all the ghastly murders and massacres in Macedonia..." (page 107, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

While there was public outcry in the streets regarding the treatment of Macedonians, the British Government cared less about Macedonia's suffering than about Bulgarian threats to their precious Ottoman Empire. Being weakened by the Macedonian rebellion, the thinking in London was that Turkey was now ripe for a Bulgarian invasion. Balfour used the Macedonian rebellion as a pretext to move Britain's Mediterranean Fleet into the Aegean Sea fearing that war between Bulgaria and Turkey was now inevitable.

At about the same time Greek-Turkish relations began to warm up. The souring relationship between Turkey and Bulgaria was seen as a new opportunity by Greece to accelerate her Hellenization activities inside Macedonia. Making her way to Turkey, Greece had to first prop up her cool relationship with Germany. Her first attempt was initiated by inviting German help to re-organize the Greek military. After that, Greece began to grant industrial and commercial favours to German businessmen including the re-organization of the Greek telegraph.

The Turks, on the other hand, were looking for allies. The loss of Ottoman Crete to the Greeks was only a bruise to the Turkish ego, so the Turks were willing to forgive and forget. Losing Macedonia, however, was serious and bolstering its friendship with Greece was one way of staving off Bulgarian advances.

To preserve whatever they could from a failing rebellion, IMRO turned its attention to diplomacy. In September 1903, Pere Toshev, of IMRO, took a trip to Tsari Grad (Constantinople) to elicit some guarantees from official representatives of the Super Powers. Toshev's only request was that Macedonia be given a Christian governor. Unfortunately, his request was rejected in favour of the status quo. Later, however, when statistics of Turkish atrocities started pouring in, the Super Power attitude softened a little. In October the Super Powers reconsidered Toshev's request, but instead of appointing a Christian governor each nation agreed to send a small "peace-keeping" force. This did not help the Macedonian position at all. In fact it hindered IMRO from self-defense initiatives even against Bashi-bazouk attacks.

Turkish atrocities committed against the Macedonian villages, in the eyes of the world, created bad publicity for Turkey and for her allies, the Western Powers. As a result, Turkish popularity started to decline and so did Turkey's favour with the Super Powers. Being financially strapped and having her hands tied, Turkey turned to her neighbours for assistance. By declaring Macedonia a "multi-interest zone" and inviting armed propaganda from Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia, to counter IMRO insurgency, Turkey was hoping to turn the tide of the rebellion in her favour. Again, Super Power inaction put Macedonia and the Macedonian people in peril.

At the end of August, after the fall of Krushevo, Nasir Pasha was appointed to take over command from Omar Rushdi Pasha. Rushdi was blamed for the flare up of the rebellion and Nasir was chosen to put an end to it. Nasir Pasha was a favourite of the Sultan, who spoke German and was considered civilized by many who had high hopes for a quick end to the rebellion. Unfortunately, Nasir's plans involved the burning of ALL revolting villages and quickly cornering and rounding up all those doing the revolting. He certainly had the "right men" with the "right courage" to execute such a barbaric plan. Unfortunately, Nasir Pasha's plan did not involve pursuing the Cheti. "...The regiments which should have been pursuing the insurgents found it more agreeable and interesting to pillage the defenseless villagers and make war on the women and children" (page 155, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future). Nasir Pasha's strategy forced IMRO and the Cheti to rethink their plans and change tactics. Henceforth, organized Cheti attacks on the Turks subsided and the Cheti regrouped to take up defensive positions. Concerned for their families and villages, some of the Cheti broke up and returned to defend their own homes. After that, fighting became disorderly and on November 2nd, 1903, the insurrection was declared at an end.

According to Brailsford, the Cheti fought about 150 battles in total with 746 casualties, which amounted to about 15 % of the total fighting force. In most of these encounters the Cheti were outnumbered by at least 10 Turks to 1 Macedonian (page 155, Macedonia its Races and their Future). Before it was all over, the Turks were attacking everywhere, even in secluded areas that once were beyond militia reach. To save themselves, many civilians resorted to camping among the fighters and even following them in wild battles. Their only safety was to be with the Cheti. "...sometimes the battle raged about the lair where the women and children lay, the men fighting with all their manhood to defend some shallow trench, knowing that behind them cowered wife and child expecting massacre if their courage failed or their bullets missed the mark" (page 162, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future).

Before I finish with the Ilinden uprising, I want to mention that even though not much action was seen in Eastern Macedonia, the Endene (Macedonian Dardanelles or Andrianople) region had also risen in 1903 to join the Macedonian rebellion. This forgotten region, that once ruled the world, belonged to Macedonia at one point in time because Macedonians to this day still live there. What the world calls Pomac (converts from Christianity to Islam) Bulgarians are in fact Macedonians who converted to Islam. It is believed that the Christians of Endrene initiated the revolt but could not sustain it for too long due to the numerical superiority of the Muslim militia and the fact that the region was without mountains and there were no places to hide.

There is no good time to wage war in any society, let alone inside a self-sufficient agrarian microcosm. The leaders of the Ilinden rebellion knew that. They also knew that they would be risking more than their own lives when they called for a revolt. The crops would not be harvested and people would starve to death. "Fleeing incessantly, they soon left behind them their stores of food and their herds of beasts. They were now shelterless under cold skies. There were villages which lived for days together

on roots and salad grasses. The young children died in large numbers, and men and women graduated for the epidemics which were to decimate those whom the Turks had spared" (page 162, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future). Those who came back from the mountains alive didn't fair well either. People from the burned villages crowded in towns where helpless masses of starving women begged for bread, door to door. They had lost everything; home, crops, cattle, and handmade clothing that were to last them for half a lifetime. It was through the generosity and charity of neighbours that most of them managed to survive. Macedonians possess a unique compassion for all living things. Love and respect for life flourishes from generation to generation and is part of the Macedonian tradition.

IMRO leaders, who survived the rebellion, responded decisively to the new crisis by establishing temporary centres where urgently needed food and medical supplies were distributed to the displaced population. While doing that, they were also fighting a political battle with the Vrhovists, for control of IMRO itself. The Bulgarians had dispatched Komitadjis (assassins) to eliminate the "old guard" but the legendary Yane Sandanski and his Cheta remained active and fought back fearlessly. When word got out that Sandanski was still active, he gained a large following and was able to successfully repel all assassination attempts.

History, in a sterile sense, tends to remark on the numbers of casualties directly associated with the conflict but shies away from the true ugliness of a war's aftermath. The real casualties of a conflict are the innocents who, through no fault of their own, are left to bear the consequences of war. The most unfortunate are those in whose home war is waged. For them, there is no escape. It is easy to show numbers and statistics of the dead, wounded, homeless, raped, orphaned, maimed, etc., but it is hard to imagine their horrific experience. History has a way of separating "us from them" and distancing our feelings from theirs. But that hardly does them justice if we can't even imagine their pain, anguish, frustration, fear, despair, hunger, humiliation, and hopelessness. Many innocent children died a horrible death in the Ilinden aftermath and their sacrifices must not be forgotten.

"The young women fared the worst, for, when the troops (Turks) could catch them, they were often carried off to the Turkish camps and there kept for some days until the last brute who desired them had had his will" (page 163, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future). Many of the young girls who survived returned to their village. Instead of finding a home they found abandoned ruins and again fell prey to prowling soldiers or marauding Bashi-bazouks.

The story of the Macedonian fallen becomes more tragic when "history books", written by Macedonia's enemies or by those influenced by "politically correct propaganda", claim the Macedonian dead to be Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbians. It seems that the injustices committed against the Macedonian people do not end with the living but continue to haunt even the dead. Is it not enough that the living are robbed of their dignity? Must the dead also be robbed of theirs? As long as authors neglect to mention the "Macedonians" in the "Macedonian epic struggle for independence" there can be no rest for the living or the dead. Those fallen men and women were Macedonians and died in a courageous struggle to free Macedonia. They were NOT Greeks, they were NOT Bulgarians, and they were NOT Serbians. Let's not allow their enemies who robbed their children of their future to also rob them of their dignity. It is imperative that historians understand that anyone who unwittingly or willingly is alleging Macedonians to be Greek, Bulgarian or Serbian is propagating the "Greek lie" and committing a moral wrong against the Macedonian people.

The Ilinden rebellion had no happy ending for Macedonia. The Macedonian people lost their bid for freedom and paid the ultimate price. Henry Brailsford in his book, Macedonia its Races and their Future, describes the Ilinden aftermath in some detail by providing specific accounts of some of the worst horrors perpetrated. Brailsford was an aid worker inside Macedonia during the conflict and was witness to some of the accounts in his book. The book is worth reading, as long as you keep in mind that when he talks about Bulgarians and Greeks he means Macedonians who belonged to the Exarchate or Patriarchate Church.

I also ran into an article on the Internet by Blagoj Stoicovski, Sixth International Congress on South-East Europe, Sofia, 1989 (MANU, Skopje 1991), "THE POST-ILINDEN EVENTS IN MACEDONIA DURING 1904 ACCORDING TO NORWEGIAN REPORTS" posted at

www.makedonika.org/STOICOVSKI1.htm The author of these reports is Karl Ingvar Nandrup, who wrote on seven separate occasions to His Majesty Oscar II, King of the Norwegian-Swedish union during his stay in Macedonia, from the beginning of 1903 to December 30, 1904. In fact, this Norwegian officer had been sent to Macedonia under the sponsorship of Sweden and Norway to work as an inspector in the Turkish Gendarmerie (as a result of the "Padar's Reforms" of February 1903). The author of the above article has succeeded in finding two of Nandrup's reports, one from May 16th and the other from December 30th, 1904. The original reports were written in Norwegian and sent to the king in dispatches from Skopje. In addition to being documents of value, the reports are also worthwhile reading. "Every village which joined the revolt did so with the knowledge that it might be burned to the ground, pillaged to the last blanket and the last chicken, and its population decimated in the process. That the Macedonians voluntarily faced these dangers is a proof of their desperation" (page 159, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future).

The Macedonian rebellion did not succeed because there were too many factors working against it. The Macedonian people showed will and determination and rose to the task in spite of all odds. Compared to the Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian rebellions, the Macedonians were the most determined, well organized, and most desperate, but they were not ready. The Serbians, Greeks, and Bulgarians had only one enemy, the Turks, and received a lot of help from friends in high places (the Super Powers). In contrast, no one beyond the Macedonians wanted the Macedonians to succeed. The Greeks and especially the Bulgarians went out of their way to create obstacles. The Super Powers, believing that they had nothing to gain, also abstained from helping Macedonia. The Serbian, Greek, and Bulgarian struggles for independence prepared the Turks and made them more determined to deal with the Macedonians. "The Turks had made war upon the women and children, and the men dared not prolong the unequal conflict with starvation" (page 163, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future).

When the conflict was over, the people who returned to their villages were devastated to find their homes destroyed. Added to all their ills, winter was fast approaching and no food or shelter was to be found. "The villages were mere heaps of charred wood and blackened stone, buried beneath a red dust which the rain converted to mud. A few walls still stood upright, the only hope for the winter" (page 164, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future). To make matters worse, a curfew was placed on travel and those away from home found themselves stranded. Those in need of work were no longer allowed to leave their vilayets. This was the first time in Macedonian history that Macedonians ever considered permanent emigration. Many early Macedonian emigrants to Canada, the USA, and Australia were refugees from the Ilinden aftermath.

When reports of the uprising could no longer be contained, and filtered out to the foreign media, it became clear that the Turks were not as successful as they had claimed, in keeping peace and maintaining the status quo in Macedonia. The Great Powers, Britain in particular, were disturbed by the atrocities committed by Turkish soldiers. On Britain's insistence the Super Powers recommended European officers take over command of the Turkish gendarmerie. Unfortunately, the European officers were Christians and the Turks refused to take orders from them. The German officers had some success because they had trained the Turks but not enough to make a difference. To prevent the situation from deteriorating further, Britain pushed for high-level reforms which resulted in the appointment of two Turkish inspectors. One was Hilmi Pasha, former governor of Yemen. He was dispatched to Solun as Inspector General with orders to reform the Turkish administration. But as usual nothing was done. "Hilmi Pasha issued a proclamation in Monastir saying that the law courts had been reformed, that the police and gendarmerie had been reorganized, that Christian village guards had been appointed, that the schools had been reopened and that roads and bridges had been repaired. He went on to announce that if indeed all was not working smoothly it was because evil people endeavoured to impede the Government" (page 112, Dakin, The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913). No one was deceived by Hilmi Pasha's words.

Before the uprising, Russia and Austria proposed "The Vienna Scheme of Reform" which basically required the Turks to appoint an Inspector General to each of the Macedonian Vilayets for a minimum of three years. In short, the reforms proposed local control of troop enlistment, local control of

finances, and appointment of foreign specialists inside Macedonia. The gendarmes were to enlist from local sources to reflect the proportion of the population. General amnesty was to be given to all under arrest or exiled and all pending law cases were to be settled without delay. Obviously these reforms did not work and their failure was blamed on Russian and Austrian neglect.

After the uprising, as the situation in Macedonia worsened, Britain, fearing that Bulgaria would imminently declare war on Turkey, pushed for more reforms. As a result on October 2nd 1903, the Murzsteg Reform Program was drafted and on October 23rd it was proposed to the Turks. The reforms in part read as follows:

1. Two Civil agents, one from Russia and the other from Austria were to be attached to the Inspector General (of police) Hilmi Pasha for two years to accompany him everywhere and call to his attention the abuses and recommend remedies. They were also expected to report all activities to their respective governments.
2. The Ottoman gendarmerie was to be reorganized by a "general of foreign nationality" and to him were to be attached military officers from the armies of the Super Powers to lead, supervise, instruct and report on the activities of the Turks.
3. As soon as the rebellion was put down, the Super Powers would demand an administrative reorganization of the Macedonian territory based on "nationalities".
4. Administrative and Judicial institutions were to be reorganized allowing Christian employees to run them.
5. Mixed committees with consular membership from Russia and Austria were to be formed in the vilayets to inquire into political and other crimes.
6. The Turkish Government was to allot a special budget to pay for the return of refugees and for rebuilding the damaged houses, schools, churches, etc. The money was to be distributed under the supervision of the Austrian and Russian consuls.
7. Christian villages burned down by Turkish troops and Bashi-bazouks were to be exempt from all taxes for one year.
8. The Turkish Government was obliged, without delay to implement the "Vienna Scheme of Reforms" introduced in February of 1903.
9. The Turkish second class reservists were to be disbanded and the Bashi-bazouks were to be prohibited from banding together.

The Murzsteg Reform Program, like its predecessor the Vienna Scheme of Reforms, clearly did not have the interest of the Macedonian people in mind. The priority here was to keep Turkey out of trouble and in control of Macedonia.

On November 24th 1903, the Turkish Government accepted the nine-point Murzsteg Reform Program in principle, reserving the right to negotiate the details later. Noting that there was a two-year limitation on provision 1, the Turks haggled over the details, introducing delay after long delay while the Super Powers continued to show indifference. Precious time was wasted as the Turks were claiming credit for the relative quietness in Macedonia, which was largely due to winter weather. In time the Murzsteg Reform Program, like its predecessor the Vienna Scheme, entered the "annals of empty promises".

As I mentioned earlier, determined to eradicate IMRO influence, Turkey turned to her neighbours for help. By declaring Macedonia a "multi-interest-zone" Turkey invited armed propaganda from Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia to counter the insurgents.

The failed uprising, the loss of so many great IMRO leaders, the Turkish backlash, and now the foreign influence was too much for IMRO. The close links with the villages and the ideological differences between isolated IMRO branches widened. Although IMRO continued to live, it lacked direction and was on the verge of an ideological collapse. In time, however, it managed to muster two more congresses. With the advent of Krste Misirkov's book, a new tide of opinion was spreading throughout Macedonia. Misirkov warned against falling under the influence of the chauvinistic elements and recommended taking a more nationalistic approach in order to weed out Vrhovist and conservative elements. At the Prilep Congress held in May 1904, IMRO was re-vitalized and its independence

reasserted (this time with a socialist character). The most significant developments to emerge from this Congress were IMRO's ability to shed itself of its conservative elements and to adopt a resolution to decentralize the organization and give more power to the sub-districts. This Congress literally split IMRO into two ideologically polarized halves. While leftist IMRO adopted a defensive strategy, the right wing conservative Vrhovists pursued a policy of renewed confrontation. The two factions continued to masquerade under the same banner and were headed for a showdown. The showdown materialized in November of 1905, at the Rila Monastery near the Macedonian-Bulgarian border and took the form of a General Congress. There was a single item of paramount importance on the agenda, to determine the direction of the Organization. Twenty-two elected delegates, in total, attended the Rila Congress and by secret vote the left came out victorious.

As a result of the Rila Congress, a rulebook was issued proclaiming the aims of the Central Committee, which basically called for:

- a. creating an autonomous and independent Macedonia,
- b. achieving this by means of a united national front, over a long period of revolutionary activity, and
- c. resisting all foreign interference.

There was one more safeguard added that is worth mentioning. IMRO now possessed the capacity to recall a rebellion by a 75% majority vote of its delegates. They could only be nominated from regional sub-committees within Macedonia; a safeguard that guaranteed there would be no more interference from Sofia and the Vrhovists.

Defeated at the Rila Congress, the Right wing Vrhovists took up permanent residence in Sofia and continued to wage a terrorist war on the IMRO leadership. Both Nikola Karev, in 1905, and Dame Gruev, in 1906, were indirectly eliminated by terrorist acts of the Vrhovists.

Bulgarian interference in Macedonia not only damaged the revolutionary movement but also put fear in the civilian population, ripening conditions for Balkan intervention. Greece and, later, Serbia were quick to take advantage of a weak IMRO and a frightened population. With the assistance of the Turkish military they were able to step up armed propaganda campaigns inside Macedonia. The aim was to kill two birds with one stone. By being the eyes and ears of the Turks, the Greek clergy spied on the Macedonians and disclosed information to Turkish authorities. The Turkish military in turn, stepped up activities to eradicate the remnants of the Cheti and their leaders. At the same time, in the midst of terror, the same Greek spies were offering Macedonians Hellenism as a way to salvation. "No one can deny that the Greeks owed much to the Turks. Indeed the victory of the Turks in 1903 was the salvation of Hellenism in Macedonia. From the outset the Greek clergy and notables devised means of passing information to the Turks. The Turkish authorities on their side welcomed this support" (pages 118, 119, Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*).

The most notorious of the Greek clergy was the Metropolitan of Kostur, Archbishop Germanos Karavangelis. Karavangelis was sent to Macedonia by the Patriarch Constantine V who favoured the Athenian (the most nationalist) style of Hellenism and selected Karavangelis as the right man to do the job. Dakin portrays Karavangelis as a charismatic and capable figure of a man that is a credit to the human race (pages 119-127, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*). That, however, is far from the truth. Karavangelis was a ruthless killer and a disgrace to the Christian religion. Karavangelis was personally responsible for the assassination of hundreds of Macedonian patriots including priests, notables, teachers, and IMRO leaders. He was also personally responsible for Hellenizing hundreds of Macedonian villages, by force and by sheer terror. If you wish to know more about Karavangelis' terrorist actions in Macedonia read his biography (the original version) "Arheio Makedonikou Agona, Pinelopis Delta, Apomnimonemata, Germanou Karavaggeli, Georgiou Dikonymou Makri, Panagioti Papatzanetea". Karavangelis' first priority after accepting the post as Metropolitan of Kostur was to raise an army. He couldn't import one, the Super Powers were watching, so he resorted to purchasing one. The most pliable and feeble-minded man who would sell his soul for gold was the self styled brigand Kote of Rula ("the darling of Athens"). Kote sold out his own people for Greek gold. From being the most revered Cheta leader, Kote became the most hated man in Macedonia. When Karavangelis decided who was to

die, Kote became the executioner. In addition to regular pay for murder, Kote and his band of no-goods received additional rewards of gold coins for turning in desired body parts from their victims. While Kote was doing the murdering in the Macedonian villages, Karavangelis, in person with Turkish escorts, was Hellenizing. Nothing and no one could stand in his way. Those who Karavangelis couldn't buy or bribe he had killed. "By containing and fragmenting the Internal Organization in Western Macedonia, Kote (Kote) and Karavangelis not only caused the projected rising to be continually postponed but they also caused it to be undertaken prematurely; and eventually they both contributed towards its defeat and failure. True, most of the recorded action (the arrests, searches and attacks on villages and bands) were carried out by the Turks, but the Turks nearly always acted on information supplied by Karavangelis or his agents. It was Karavangelis again who prevailed upon the Turks to attack Smardeshi (Smurdersh) on 9/22 May 1903" (page 132, Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*).

"After the Ilinden rising of August 1903, it was Karavangelis who, escorted by 600 Turkish soldiers, visited the villages, celebrating mass, speaking to the villagers and calling upon them to surrender arms. The result was that even such strongholds as Aposkepos (Aposkep), Zagoritsani (Zagoricheni) and Gabresi (Gabresh), which only a few months before had declared themselves Exarchist, now returned to the Patriarchist fold. Without the support of the Turks, it is doubtful whether Karavangelis's work would have been successful. It is equally doubtful, however, whether but for the activities of the Patriarchist counter-movement, the Turkish authorities could have dealt such a decisive blow to the Internal Organization (IMRO)" (page 135, Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*).

Even my own small village Oshchima didn't escape the hand of Karavangelis. It was a Sunday morning when Georgios Tsantos (Varda) and his gang came to Oshchima looking to murder Pop Giorgi Popov. On the way they ran into a young man named Yane Zhigerov who was taking his mule to pasture. It is unknown what transpired but the young man was found dead, with his throat cut. After killing Yane, Varda broke into Oshchima's, Svety Nikola, church and killed Pop Giorgi, by stabbing him multiple times. He then skinned the beard off his face and cut off his blessing finger. Varda was prepared to kill many more had it not been for the Oshchimian Cheta led by Bozhin Temov who drove Varda and his hoodlums out of Oshchima at gunpoint. Pop Giorgi Popov's beard and finger were delivered to Karavangelis in exchange for gold.

With regards to Kote from Rula, greed was stronger than loyalty. Lazo Papatraikov, an usher at Kote's wedding and a man who twice saved Kote's life, was on Karavangelis's hit list. After a skirmish with the Turks in Mariovo, word was out that IMRO leader Lazo Papatraikov had received a wound on the head and was on the run. Kote caught up to him at Turtska Polena in Oshchima and after a long chat the two men said their good byes and Kote left. On his way to Zhelevo, Kote sent some Zhelevtsi to kill and decapitate Lazo. Lazo's head was taken to Karavangelis to collect the reward. Lazo's headless body was buried behind the altar in the Sveti Nikola Church in Oshchima.

The ultimate disgrace for Karavangelis came after the massacre of the village Zagoricheni. Refusing to bend to Hellenism, Zagoricheni, on direct orders from Karavangelis, was massacred to the last person the Greeks could lay their hands on, including the unborn children inside the wombs of pregnant women. Witnesses reported finding bodies of pregnant women with their abdomens cut open. The survivors who escaped the atrocity refused to bury the dead bodies of their neighbours. For days the dead were guarded until the European consuls in Bitola came to witness the atrocities for themselves. Here is what Brailsford had to say. "The chef d'oeuvre of this Hellenic campaign was achieved at Zagoricheni, a large Bulgarian village (author's note: Macedonian village, there were no Bulgarian villages inside Macedonia) near Klissoura, which, like Mokreni, took a leading part in the uprising of 1903, and like Mokreni was burned by the Turks. A Greek band, which is said to have numbered over two hundred men under three Greek officers in uniform, surprised it by night (April 6-7, 1905) by using bugle calls which led the villagers to suppose that Turkish regulars were manoeuvring in the neighbourhood. They burned ten houses, and twenty-eight of the temporary homes erected amid the ruins of the last conflagration. They wounded seven persons and killed no less than sixty, among them seven women, twenty-two persons over sixty years of age, and five children under fifteen. There was a good deal of

evidence to show that the local Turkish authorities were privy to this massacre, and some circumstances seemed to include the Archbishop of Castoria (Kostur). It is quite clear that no conflict or provocation preceded what was simply a deliberate massacre, and the only reason for choosing Zagoricheni was that it was an eager and patriotic Bulgarian center, and that it disobeyed the summons of the Greek Archbishop to return to the Patriarch fold" (pages 216-217, Macedonia its Races and their Future). After the massacre when it was discovered that Karavangelis was implicated, to escape punishment, the cowardly Archbishop of Kostur fled to Sveta Gora (Holy Mountain) where he spent two years in hiding before fleeing to Austria. Today, there is a statue of Karavangelis in Kostur to commemorate his great contributions to Hellenism.

The Roumanie of Bucharest has published the text of a circular found by the Turks in some documents seized on the person of a Greek prisoner. It reads like a genuine Greek document, and its authenticity has not been questioned by the Greek organs. It is said to bear the seal of the Greek Committee. (Remember there were no Bulgarians or "Bulgars" in Macedonia). It read like this: "Brave defenders of Hellenism, I address you today in order to express the gratitude which the entire nation feels for all you have done and will yet do on behalf of the Fatherland. Continue the struggle against the Bulgarian assassins, and neglect no means of proving to the whole world that Macedonia is purely Greek. Exterminate the priests, the teachers, and the notables who compose the Bulgarian Committees. It is at length time to put in practice the saying: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. When it is a question of taking vengeance we must not spare the Bulgarians, even when they hide under the robes of a priest. Burn, shoot, assassinate, and purify the soil of Macedonia from all that is Exarchist. The Supreme Panhellenic Committee has decided to intensify the struggle by making use of your arms, O valiant combatants, and if for some time past the Committee has hardly seemed equal to the occasion, the reason is that official Greece hesitates. But what is official Greece to us, when we have the approbation of the whole Hellenic world? Forward, then, until you have wiped out the last Bulgarian in our Macedonia. Your names will be inscribed in letters of fire in the annals of the race. May Heaven grant that the day be near when the sun of Hellenism will shine on Macedonia; then there will be peace for us and for the Turks, with whom we stand on the best of terms. Let our motto be: Purge Macedonia of the Bulgars." I quote from M. Gaulis' admirable paper, La Macedoine (page 217, Brailsford, Macedonia its Races and their Future).

Macedonians were well acquainted with the murderous activities of the Bulgarian Vrhovists whose new waves of terrorist bands began to penetrate the eastern borders of Macedonia in March of 1904. Fortunately, Yane Sandanski's forces were still in control of the Pirin district and more often than not, successfully repelled Bulgarian advances. In the west bands of young Turks, who deserted the army during the Ilinden rebellion, joined Albanian gangs, looting and killing indiscriminately. From the north Serbian bands began to penetrate Macedonian territory. By mid 1905, there were eleven bands numbering almost 100 men pillaging, murdering, razing entire villages, and wreaking their own special brand of terror. The most violent campaign was waged by the Greek terrorists who penetrated the south-central regions of Macedonia. By 1905 the Greeks imported a contingent of Cretans, a thousand-strong, reinforced by Turk deserters who roamed unhindered razing and slaughtering entire villages. By 1906, eight bands numbering over 400 men were operating in the Solun district alone and another twelve bands (600 men) around Bitola.

Along with the intrusions of armed bands in Macedonia there reappeared the foreign schools and propaganda institutions directed by the Greek and Bulgarian churches. The terrorist bands instilled fear in the Macedonian population and the churches were quick to take on the role of protector, setting the stage for the partitioning of Macedonia. Unfortunately for them, something else was brewing within Turkey, liberalism, headed by a small group of, European educated, young Turks.

Macedonia the Young Turk Uprising and the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913

The Murzsteg Reform Program was the last hope for the Super Powers to salvage the Ottoman Empire in Macedonia. While the Murzsteg Reform Program proved fruitless for the Macedonians, it raised hopes for Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia. Item 3 of the Murzsteg Reform Program, which stated “as soon as the rebellion is put down, the Super Powers would demand an administrative reorganization of the Macedonian territory based on nationalities”, caught the eye of the Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian protagonists.

It was well known that there were no Greek, Bulgarian or Serbian nationalities living in Macedonia but that didn't stop the new Balkan States from inventing them. The wheels of the protagonists were turning when they attempted to kill two birds with one stone by cleverly substituting “nationality” for “religious affiliation”. By the end of the 19th century, the Christian Millet of Ottoman Macedonia was already divided into two millets (the Greek Patriarchist Millet and the Bulgarian Exarchist Millet). First, since there was no Macedonian Millet there was no “governing body” to represent a Macedonian religious denomination. Second, since all Christians in Macedonia already belonged to one millet or another, it was easy to make “nationality” claims on behalf of “religious affiliation”. In modern terms, all Macedonians belonging to the Patriarchist fold were considered to be Greek by nationality. Similarly, all those Macedonians belonging to the Exarchist fold were considered to be Bulgarian by nationality. By introducing Serbian churches and schools, Serbia later used similar tactics to claim the existence of a Serbian nationality inside Macedonia.

All Macedonians belonging to the Patriarchist church were given Greek or “Hellenized” names. Similarly, all Macedonians belonging to the Exarchist church were given Bulgarian names. In many instances brothers, born of the same parents, were given different last names because they happened to go to different churches. Their choice of church had nothing to do with loyalty to one faction or the other, but rather with the church's location relative to home. Each brother attended the church nearest to his house as he had always done. The sad part was that now with every spoonful of religion came a dose of venomous propaganda. Brother was pitted against brother, one fighting for “Hellenism” and the other for “Bulgarism”. At the beginning of the Ilinden rebellion most Macedonian villages belonged to the Exarchate Church. With increased Greek activities through Karavangelis and others like him, however, the tide was turning. The Greek success was mainly due to the Turkish-Greek alliance and the Turkish militia's assistance. The Macedonian people were frightened to a point of being willing to do anything to escape further punishment.

The alliance, which gave the Greeks the upper hand, did not go unnoticed by the Bulgarians. British fears of a Turkish-Bulgarian war were alleviated when Bulgaria on April 8th, 1904 signed a peace agreement with Turkey. Bulgaria promised to reduce subversive actions in Macedonia in exchange for Turkish promises to implement the Murzsteg Reform Program and to extend it to the Endrene (Macedonian Dardanelles) region. Russia was not too happy about the agreement, especially since Bulgaria herself was beginning to make moves towards Endrene. Being of strategic importance, Russia was hoping to eventually annex Endrene for herself.

The prospect of declining Bulgarian intrusions inside Macedonia was welcome news for Karavangelis. The Greeks could now import fighters from Crete, to fight the Macedonian Cheti, side by side with their Turkish allies without Bulgarian interference. Unfortunately, while they reduced military intrusions, the Bulgarians stepped up Exarchist activities creating stiff competition for the Greeks. The clergy on both sides were going after the same flock as both sides appointed themselves protectors and guardians of the people. In the eyes of the world, they became ambassadors of the Christian flock in Macedonia. This competition to attract parishioners created friction between the opposing factions. Friction turned to violence in villages where both groups existed and fought for control over the village church. The Turks were indifferent to the squabbling due to its religious nature, and remained neutral in church disputes. When fights erupted, the Turks padlocked the church so neither group could use it. As competition for control of the village churches intensified so did brigand warfare. Local squabbling never went unnoticed and both Patriarchists and Exarchists sent their hatchet men to eliminate the so-called “troublemakers”. Many priests, teachers, notables, and community leaders lost their lives this way.

The Western Powers had little faith in the Turks and their old Ottoman conservative Islamic values but preferred the status quo maintained in Macedonia. There were two factors at play that hindered the Powers from taking action. The first was the lucrative Ottoman import-export markets upon which the Ottoman consumer was dependent for a variety of goods, and a moneymaking venture for the Western Capitalists which they did not want to lose. The second was the power struggle between the Super Powers themselves over Balkan domination. The Powers were locked in a diplomatic embrace where none could freely maneuver without upsetting the others. Each of the Super Powers knew that a sudden or massive shift in any one's policies would result in an engagement that would involve all of them. No one wanted a "world war" on his hands.

Britain, at one point, contemplated creating an autonomous Macedonia but knew that Russia and Austria would be against it. "It was fortunate for Greece at this juncture that Lansdowne's plans foundered in a sea of European politics and that both Russia and Austria opposed Macedonian autonomy" (page 152, Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*). This is an important fact for ALL to know, which is contrary to "Greek propaganda", that no Macedonians existed before 1945. Here is documented proof that a Macedonian nation did exist prior to the 19th century and came very close to achieving independence. The Ilinden rebellion was ALL about Macedonia and about Macedonians asserting their desire to live as equals in the world. The Super Powers, especially Britain and Russia, owe it to the Macedonian people to come clean and put an end to the incessant "Greek propaganda". It no longer makes any sense to keep the Macedonian people from taking their rightful place in the world. They are certainly not a threat to anyone. Those who committed crimes against the Macedonian people and continue to deny their existence obviously have a problem. But why punish the victims, for being victims?

The Western powers were not happy with the way Turkey was dealing with the reforms in Macedonia but at the same time they could not agree among themselves about finding a viable solution. The Ilinden uprising was a wakeup call to how urgently reforms were needed.

"During the later part of the 19th new social forces had emerged within Turkey. Given the conditions of absolutism within the Empire, the emergence of liberalism seemed inevitable. This new creed took the form of political agitation, calling for a broad spectrum of reforms. It was headed by an embryonic Turkish bourgeoisie, and supported by an European-educated intelligentsia" (page 125, Radin, *IMRO and the Macedonian Question*).

The Young Turk movement had been active for at least thirty years, ever since Turkish students were allowed to attend European schools on mass. Among other things, the Young Turks were in favour of granting self-government to Macedonia, Thrace, and Albania and believed that the Ottoman Empire could be salvaged via reforms. When the 1903 Ilinden rebellion started, many of these European educated students had already joined the ranks of the Turkish military as junior officers. The atrocities committed and the methods used in dealing with the rebels during the Ilinden aftermath, however, went against the principles of these young men and many deserted the Turkish army. Some joined roving Albanian bands in hopes of eliciting their assistance to form an opposition to the Sultan. Some attempted to establish contacts with IMRO, hoping that IMRO would join them to rise against the Sultan.

By 1905, the Young Turks organized under the banner of "Union and Progress" and established themselves in Solun, away from the grasp of the Sultan in Tsari Grad (Constantinople). It was not too long before they gained some measure of control over the local Turkish army, especially in Macedonia. It was not difficult to convince soldiers serving in Macedonia that anything was better than killing and murdering women and children.

After observing the actions of the Young Turks, the IMRO leadership was convinced that it was better to work with them than against them. The Young Turks also offered self-government and significant agrarian reforms, if they gained power, which was attractive to most IMRO leaders. Dame Gruev and Nikola Karev were already dead, which left IMRO in the hands of Gjorce Petrov, who favoured a policy of urban-led insurrection. Popularity and the strength of the rebellion, however, lay in the hands of the legendary Yane Sandanski. He was in favour of supporting the Young Turk regime, especially their prospective agrarian reform programs.

The actions of the Young Turks did not go unnoticed by the Sultan who complained to the Super Powers but did not receive an immediate reaction. The coup d'état did not materialize until "rising star" Enver Beg from Albania was summoned to Tsari Grad to receive a military promotion from the Sultan. Fearing it was an assassination attempt, Enver Beg and his followers fled to the mountains and called for the revolution to begin.

The rebellion first materialized in the larger cities in the form of demonstrations. On June 22nd, 1908, Solun alone drew over 20,000 protesters. By July 3rd, the Young Turk officers took control of most of the Sultan's forces and by July 22nd all of Macedonia was free.

True to their word, the Young Turks released all political prisoners and began to work on reforms. Their first act was to send the Sultan an ultimatum to reinstate the 1876 Constitution. Being in no position to resist, Sultan Abdul Hamid II reluctantly obliged. As soon as the constitution was reinstated, amnesty was proclaimed for all those under arms, including the Cheta and all foreign bands. The Macedonians, Serbians, and Bulgarians took advantage of the amnesty, came down from the mountains and surrendered their arms. The Greeks who had the most to lose were at first hesitant but warmed up to the idea. They had dreams that they might reclaim their former glory in the Phanar.

As it turned out, however, the Young Turks were very suspicious of the Greeks and watched them with caution. The Greek dream to rule from the Phanar did not materialize. In time, by deactivating and expelling armed bands, the Young Turk regime brought some stability to Macedonia.

The Young Turk regime, headquartered in Solun, survived unobstructed for over six months. Then, with support from Yane Sandanski's Cheta, the Young Turks attacked and successfully took Tsari Grad. Unfortunately, by now it was becoming evident that the Young Turk regime was too dependent on the Turkish establishment and bureaucracy for its survival. As a result, it had to subordinate most of its reform programs to safeguard its own power. In actual fact, after all this time in power, the Young Turk regime did very little to alleviate the social and economic problems in the Macedonian villages.

To prompt the Young Turks to deliver on their promises, Sandanski had a plan of his own. He proposed that in exchange for IMRO's help, the Young Turks were required to redistribute much needed land in favour of the poor (landless) Macedonians. Additionally, to ensure the land reforms were put in place according to agreements, Sandanski requested that he personally be given the task of organizing a peasant militia to supervise the implementation. Unfortunately, while Sandanski's proposals were widely accepted by the Macedonian peasants, they attracted negative attention abroad. The first to complain were the Greeks as follows; "The consequences of Sandanski's plan, as unfortunately confirmed by events, would be terrible (for us). Unless something else, like a war, or an agreement between the European Powers, settles the Macedonian question in our favour, it is my opinion that there can be no doubt that settlement of the agrarian question would create possibilities for the final settlement of the Macedonian question..." (page 127, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

Sandanski's move for cooperation with the Young Turks was a radical departure from IMRO's policies (seizure of power by revolutionary means). To take advantage of the new situation and stay on course, IMRO created an offshoot branch dubbed the "National (or Peoples') Federative Party"(NFP). The NFP was officially launched in early 1909 and worked with (pressured) the Young Turk regime to develop a quasi-parliamentary system and to preserve the national and territorial integrity of Macedonia within an Ottoman Federation.

By the time the NFP was organized and ready to deal with the issues at hand, the Young Turk regime was losing momentum and stagnating. By now it was obvious to IMRO that without "grass roots" support from the Turkish establishment, the regime was fighting a losing battle. Its rise to power resulted from a coup and the regime itself was no more than a "dictatorship".

The Young Turk regime was a "Western backed idea", an "alternate solution" to a problem with no end. The majority of IMRO leaders could no longer agree to provide continued support and were contemplating breaking off relations with the Young Turks. To make matters worse, a class struggle (socialism) was brewing in Europe causing unrest between the rich and poor; dividing people along class lines. The so-called "religious wars" between the Patriarchists and Exarchists were also having their effects, further dividing IMRO and the Macedonian people. By 1910, armed propaganda in Macedonia

was replaced by Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian “Political Clubs” which continually worked against NFP agendas and the NFP leaders.

While Russia was having mixed feelings about the Young Turk regime, the European powers, especially Britain who through intrigue created the regime, were relieved to be rid of the old reform programs. Britain approved of the cooperation between NFP and the Young Turks, which caused further fracturing between the NFP (who wanted to create an autonomous Macedonia inside an Ottoman Federation) and “grass roots” IMRO (who wanted independence by armed rebellion). Unfortunately, the Young Turk regime, with all its promises, did not meet expectations and reverted to the old Turkish way of rule. To stave off attempted coups by extremist factions, the Young Turk regime resorted to dictatorial rule in place of fostering liberal programs. This clampdown manifested itself in a number of repressive laws in Macedonia including the laws on strikes, political associations, and armed bands. This policy reversal again destabilized Macedonian society by bringing back the old oppressive political climate. The NFP and all other political, cultural, and professional organizations were effectively banned, forcing IMRO to go underground. The Macedonian people, in the meantime, were thrown back into anarchy and things went downhill from there.

The Young Turk regime predicted its own demise. To save itself, between 1910 and 1911, it resettled almost a quarter of a million Turks in Macedonia, hoping to maintain control of Macedonia if it was ejected from Tsari Grad. They faced several fronts, however, including the Albanian revolution in 1909-1912, the Italian-Turkish war in Libya in 1911, domestic opposition, the resurgence of armed bands, and finally the Sultan’s new loyal army. The Young Turk regime could no longer maintain a hold on power and on July 13, 1912, capitulated to the Sultan.

In the meantime, the Super Powers were locked in a struggle of their own where none could maneuver without upsetting the delicate balance of the status quo. While the Super Powers were held in balance by their own political vices, the new Balkan nations were flexing their economic and military muscles. Alliances like the Serbian-Bulgarian league against Greek-Turkish collusion or the Greek-Romanian league against Bulgarian aims at Macedonia came and went. On the surface it seemed that everything was normal but deep inside a rift was developing.

The rift became apparent when Russian-Austrian relations began to seriously cool. Dividing lines were drawn as Russia began to warm up to Britain and France while Austria began to warm up to Germany. Italy remained neutral for a while and took a few shots at Turkey but was prohibited (by the other powers) from attacking the centers of Turkish power. (It was through these campaigns that Italy occupied the Dodecanese). Even though Italy was restrained from further campaigns, it weakened Turkey enough for the three new Balkan States to consider campaigns of their own. Italy’s actions were also a sign of things to come and created an atmosphere of urgency for the new states to expedite their own plans for territorial annexation.

Everyone wanted a piece of Macedonia but no one dared stick out his neck to get it. The three wolves of the Balkans, with Russian help, realized that each alone could not accomplish what the three could do together. They swallowed their pride, put their differences aside, and by the end of 1911 they started negotiations.

As a way of preventing Austrian aspirations in the Balkans, Russia invited the idea of a Serbian-Bulgarian league. Russia hoped that, jointly, Serbia and Bulgaria would be able to withstand Austrian advances in Macedonia without her involvement. After getting them to agree to talk, Serbia and Bulgaria listed their terms but could not reach an agreement. Autonomy for Macedonia was one major issue of contention upon which they could not agree. While Sofia supported the idea of autonomy Belgrade opposed it. Finally, for the sake of expediting the negotiations, all parties agreed that the “autonomy question” would be left separate and dealt with after the annexation of Macedonia.

Russia made it clear to both parties that they couldn’t invade Macedonia without her permission and only if Turkey became a threat to the Christian population. In the meantime, Serbia was encouraged to take steps to annex Albania and Kosovo. A draft Serbian-Bulgarian agreement was reached and signed on March 13th, 1912. Included in the agreement was a crude delineation of prospective boundaries and

suggestions that the final boundaries might be settled by force of arms. The Russians also insisted that Tsar Nikolas II would arbitrate any disputes regarding the exact territorial limits.

Even before the Serbian-Bulgarian agreement was finalized, Greece was already having discussions with Bulgaria about negotiating a Greek-Bulgarian agreement. The Greek-Bulgarian negotiations, like the Serbian-Bulgarian negotiations, were conducted in secret known only to the Greek King, Prime Minister Venizelos, and their negotiator “The Times” correspondent J. D. Bouchier, an old friend of Venizelos. Like the Serbs, the Greeks had always opposed the idea of Macedonian autonomy but the Bulgarians were unwilling to proceed until Greece agreed to the autonomy. The Greek-Bulgarian treaty was signed on May 30th 1912, both parties promising not to attack one another and to come to each other’s defense should Turkey attack them.

The “Balkan League of Nations” was spawned in June 1912 and shortly after Turkey was given a signed ultimatum bearing the League’s signature, which in short, read “deliver the promised reforms in Macedonia or prepare to be invaded”.

There was much intrigue, agreements, counter agreements, and secret deals between the League of Nations (Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia) but from the outset each was determined to exploit any situation that developed, purely for its own gain. “The League of Nations in fact was simply a device for synchronizing a military effort upon the part of the four powers (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro) who had come to realize that the simplest way to settle the Turkish question, before it was too late and while circumstances were favourable, was to attack Turkey simultaneously and present the European powers with a *fait accompli*” (page 440, Dakin, *The Greek Struggle in Macedonia 1897-1913*). All that remained now was to provoke Turkey into committing an offence against the Christian population and the invasion would become a reality.

Using proven techniques of terrorism to prepare the battleground, Vrhovists, masquerading as IMRO agents, conducted many raids inside Macedonia murdering, raping, and plundering villages in hopes that the Macedonian bands would be blamed. When the Turks investigated the disturbances, both Patriarchist and Exarchist authorities corroborated their stories and pinned these acts on the Macedonians. As expected, the Turks responded swiftly and dealt with the situation in the usual manner. Unfortunately for the Turks, their actions were welcome news to the League’s spies who dispatched them to the European press. The Turks, in the eyes of the world, committed atrocities against the Christians in Macedonia and something had to be done. It was now up to the Super Powers to decide the course of action.

Along with documents of Turkish atrocities, the foreign press was also receiving well-camouflaged League propaganda. The League had commenced extensive propaganda campaigns against the Turks, detailing every Turkish act for European consumption. A war was imminent but, according to the League’s propaganda, it was a necessary war to “liberate” the enslaved Christians from Turkish oppression. The League, through extensive media campaigns, called on all Christians in Macedonia to join the League and oust the oppressive Turk. Here is what Yane Sandanski had to say; “We ought to work on the awakening of the consciousness of the Macedonian masses that they are an independent nation...because those who seek to ‘liberate them’... will actually be coming to enslave them...” (page 134, Radin, *IMRO and the Macedonian Question*).

As I mentioned earlier, the Western Powers had not exhausted the full potential of the Ottoman markets and were unwilling to let the Ottoman regime in Macedonia collapse. At the same time Britain, France, Italy, and Russia were greatly concerned about the aggressive attitudes of Germany outside of the Balkans. More importantly, they were concerned that the Turkish regime was leaning towards a Turkish-German alliance.

When Russia proposed the idea of a “Balkan League of Nations” it was welcome news for Britain, France, and Italy. The League was viewed as an anti-German front, a way of ejecting the Ottoman regime from Europe and at the same time, safeguarding (British, French, and Italian) interests and expansionary ambitions. The not so obvious Russian motive for sponsoring the League, was to guarantee its own influence in the Balkans perhaps through Serbia or Bulgaria or both.

On October 18th, 1912 Montenegro declared war on Turkey with the League following suit. The battles that ensued were fought almost entirely on Macedonian soil, once again causing the Macedonians to suffer from someone else's war.

Russia, the architect of the Balkan League was against a war in 1912 and so were France and Britain. A war at this point might throw off the delicate diplomatic balance and escalate into a "world war". Russia feared that the half-millennium old Ottoman Empire might not be as easy a target as the League had estimated. Britain and France feared a backlash from Germany and Austria, now that Turkey was warming up to them as a prospective ally. To stop the League's aggressive actions, both Britain and France threatened them with economic sanctions but that was not enough to suppress the appetites of the three hungry Balkan wolves.

The League's plan was to surround the Turkish army in Macedonia and force it out to Tsari Grad. To everyone's surprise, however, the League won a crushing and unexpected victory in just six weeks. Five Ottoman divisions were surrounded and defeated in two battles, in Bitola and Kumanovo. With the exception of Sandanski and a force of 400 Macedonians who fought back and liberated Melnik and Nevrokop, the League received no opposition from the Macedonians. In fact, the enthusiasm created by the "liberators" not only helped the League fight harder but also encouraged thousands of Macedonians to enlist in the League's armies. "A Macedonian Militia force of 14,000 fought under the Bulgarian command in the East. The 'Volunteer regiment', directed by IMRO veterans, consisted of a thousand Macedonians, Turks and Albanians. In the Serbian and Greek armies, Macedonian detachments such as the 'National Guard' and the 'Holy Band', were given the task of encircling the Turks to fight their retreat" (page 143, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question). Even Chakalarov, the protector of the Lerin and Kostur regions, joined the fight to help the League get rid of the Turks. The League's victories and intense propaganda were so convincing that the entire Macedonian nation welcomed the "liberators" with open arms.

The moment the three wolves evicted the Turkish army from Macedonia, they quickly worked out a partitioning strategy along the following lines: Serbia was to receive the northwestern portion of Macedonia, which included Skopje, Bitola, south to west of Lerin, east to Gevgelija, and west to the Albanian Mountains. Bulgaria was to receive all of Thrace, west to Gevgelija, south to the Aegean Sea, and east from Solun. Greece was to receive north to Lerin, west to the Albanian Mountains, all of Epirus, and east to Solun. "To ensure their hegemony and quell any dissent, the occupying forces set up the apparatus of government and, by legislative decrees, extended their own constitutions to these new bodies, from which Macedonians were absent. Indeed, in many provincial centres, such as Gevgelija, a double or triple condominium was established, much to the detriment of the Macedonian citizens" (page 143, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

In view of the Macedonian contribution to the League's success in evicting the Turks, in December 12th, 1912, Sandanski called for Macedonian autonomy. The League's occupying armies, however, refused to budge and initiated a violent assimilation program. The Macedonian fighters, who fought side by side with the League's armies, found themselves policed by a joint League command ensuring that no resistance or independent action would arise. The League also pursued Sandanski and his men. Sandanski resisted and stayed active in the Pirin Region until his assassination in 1915 by Bulgarian agents.

The changing conditions inside Macedonia forced the IMRO leadership to seek refuge in foreign cities away from home. Some of the more prominent leaders moved to St. Petersburg and joined the Macedonian community living there. This small group of Macedonians consistently lobbied for Macedonian Statehood and, in the war's aftermath, acted as a government in exile. The most outspoken advocate of the Macedonian leaders was Dimitar Chupovski who published the "Macedonian Voice" and continuously protested to the Super Powers against Macedonia's partition. In June 1913 he wrote; "The division of Macedonia among the brother nations is the most unjust act in the history of these nations – it is trampling on the rights of man, and a disgrace for the entire Slav race" (page 145, Radin, IMRO and the

Macedonian Question). In total, eleven issues of “Macedonian Voice” were published and distributed all over Europe.

“A great terror reigns in Macedonia now. The ‘freedom’ of the allies has no frontiers, no-one from Macedonia has the right to travel outside, to protest or complain before the European states. Whoever disturbs this order is either killed or imprisoned. The allies surround Macedonia with a Chinese Wall...” (page 145, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

The Macedonian people must not stand idly by and accept the unworthy fate of being divided so that others may profit from it. “In the name of the Macedonian people, we demand that Macedonia remain a single, indivisible, independent Balkan state within its geographical, ethnographic, historical, economic and cultural frontiers...Macedonia represents a unified body both from the historical and natural viewpoints, and cannot voluntarily end its many centuries of existence by agreeing to be broken up...Can we allow a people to be, at one and the same time, Bulgarian, Serb and Greek? Is it not simpler to assume that the nationality attributed to us is dictated by the big power politics of the interested parties who wish to take over Macedonia?” (page 145, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

By November it was becoming apparent that Turkey was running out of options and on November 12th, 1912, called on the Super Powers to bring about an armistice. To deal with the situation a peace conference was scheduled for December 16th, 1912, to take place in London. Having some time to adjust to the new situation, the Super Powers, for the first time, opted from the usual “status quo” recommendations and considered making concessions to the victors. Austria, however, was not too happy at the prospect of a “large Serbia” let alone allowing Serbia access to the Adriatic Sea. Austria was eyeing the Adriatic region as a prospective sphere of influence for herself. Being unable to make concessions by herself, however, Austria did the next best thing and agreed with Britain to the idea of “creating” a new State (Albania). Another reason why Austria did not want Serbia to have access to the Adriatic Sea was because a Serbian port might become a Russian port.

This attempt to deny Serbia access to the Adriatic Sea not only left Serbia landlocked but also upset Russia, causing her to break relations with Austria. Italy too was affected by this diplomatic power play, pushing her to improve her relations with Austria. This, as it turned out, was the crucial historic moment which gave birth to the “Triple Alliance” (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy) and the “Triple Entente” (Britain, France, and Russia), a division that would have future consequences.

As a result of this sudden change of events, Austria began to amass troops along the Serbian border. At the same time, fearing German intervention, Russia ordered a halt to Bulgarian and Serbian advances towards Tsari Grad. To fully curb Serbian and Russian expansionism: France, Britain, and Italy voted to grant the newly created Albanian State, full independence. This saved Albania from partitioning by the Greeks and Serbians and made her a Super Power protectorate, which Albanians enjoy to this day.

I want to emphasize that, by 1912 it was well known that a Macedonian Nation with a Macedonian consciousness existed and demonstrated its desire for independence. These actions were well documented and familiar to the Super Powers, yet even after pleading their case, the Macedonians were NOT ALLOWED to attend the London Peace Conference of December 16th, 1912. Numerous petitions were made by IMRO affiliates from St. Petersburg, all ignored. Also, Chupovski’s memo to the British delegation was not tabled. Here is what Chupovski (in part) had to say; “In the name of natural law, of history, of practical expediency, for the Macedonian people, we ask that Macedonia’s right to self-determination be admitted, and that Macedonia be constituted within its ethnic, geographical and cultural borders as a self-governing state with a government responsible to a national assembly” (page 147, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

The London Conference adjourned on August 11, 1913, officially declaring an end to the First Balkan War. In spite of all the wheeling and dealing that went on during the conference, the resolutions left all parties dissatisfied. Serbia was dissatisfied with losing the Albanian territory. Serbia appealed to Bulgaria to grant her access to the Aegean Sea via Solun and the Vardar valley, but her appeals fell on deaf ears. Greece also was not happy with Bulgaria’s invasion and annexation of Endrene (Macedonian Dardanelles). To balance her share, Greece wanted Serres, Drama, and Kavala as compensation. That too

fell on deaf ears. Bulgaria, frustrated with not achieving her “San Stefano Dream” (fiction), was bitter about Russia deserting her during the London Conference negotiations.

Seeing that Bulgaria was not going to budge and the fact that neither Greece nor Serbia alone could take on Bulgaria, should a conflict arise, Greece and Serbia concluded a secret pact of their own to jointly act against Bulgaria. In short, the objective was to take territory from Bulgaria west of the Vardar River, divide it, and have a common frontier.

After stumbling upon this Greek-Serbian pact, despite Russian attempts to appease her by offering her Solun, Bulgaria remained bitter and in a moment of weakness, was lured away by Austria. By going over to Austria, Bulgaria in effect broke off all relations with the Balkan League. Russia, disappointed with the Bulgarian shift in loyalty, made it clear that Bulgaria could no longer expect any help.

In what was to be termed the “Second Balkan War”, the Bulgarian army, unprovoked, attacked its former allies on June 30th, 1913, again on Macedonian soil. Preferring the element of surprise, Bulgaria turned on her former allies and renewed the conflict, officially turning the Macedonian mission from “liberation” to “occupation”. There were two things that Bulgaria didn’t count on, Romanian involvement and Austrian treachery. The bloody fight was short lived as Romania, Montenegro, and Turkey joined Greece and Serbia dealing Bulgaria a catastrophic blow. The promised Austrian support didn’t materialize as the risks for Austrian involvement outweighed any benefits. The real surprise, however, was Romania’s break with neutrality. Up to now Romania had remained neutral and refused to get involved. No one, not even Bulgaria, anticipated this attack from the north. However, this was a once in a lifetime opportunity for Romania to regain lost territory. Even Turkey was able to re-gain some of what she had recently lost to Bulgaria. Being involved in too many fronts at the same time, Bulgaria was unable to repel Turkey and prevent her from taking back the Endrene region. The biggest winners however, were Greece and Serbia, both of whom got exactly what they wanted, virtually unabated.

The Macedonians fared worst in the conflict mainly due to their own enthusiasm. One faction misinterpreted Macedonian assistance to another, as disloyalty. As frontlines shifted positions, Macedonian citizens were exposed to the various factions. Those Macedonians who assisted one faction were butchered by another faction, for showing sympathy to the enemy. “The Carnegie Relief Commission, dispatched to the Balkans in late 1913, reported the incredible story of human suffering. In Macedonia alone, 160 villages were razed leaving 16,000 homeless, several thousand civilians murdered, and over 100,000 forced to emigrate as refugees” (page 149, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question). This genocidal tragedy was committed in a relatively short time, by those who marched in and were welcomed as “liberators”. Worst and most unexpected was that “Christians” committed this genocide against “Christians”, reminiscent of the 1204 tragedy committed by the Western Crusaders.

After a great deal of jockeying for position, deliberating, and negotiating, the warring factions agreed to an armistice, and peace between Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia was negotiated in August, 1913 in Bucharest. The map of Macedonia was again redrafted without Macedonian participation. The new boundaries ignored previously agreed upon considerations such as lines of “nationalities” (not that any existed), the Macedonian people’s democratic desires, etc., as the Bucharest delegates imposed their artificial sovereignty upon the Macedonian people. With the exception of one minor change in 1920 in Albania’s favour, these dividing lines have remained in place to this day. Of the total Macedonian territory 50% went to Greece, 40% to Serbia, and 10% to Bulgaria. August 10th, 1913 became the darkest day in Macedonian history.

Not since Roman times has Macedonia been partitioned in a way where three brothers were forced to assume three different (imposed) identities, speak three different foreign languages in their own homes, and were treated as strangers in their own lands. The future will show that where half a millennium of Turkish suppression and a century of forced Hellenization/ Bulgarization couldn’t erode Macedonian consciousness, Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian aggression, in less than a decade, would. The once proud Macedonian nation, that long ago conquered the world, bridged the gap between east and west, introduced Christianity to Europe, safeguarded all ancient knowledge, and protected the west from eastern invaders, had now been beaten and reduced to a shadow of its former self. The force of this latest

intrusion transformed the Macedonian nation into a shy creature, seeking homes in foreign lands, and hiding in the twilight while its enemies danced on the heads of its dead and, to the world, proclaimed them as their own. It was not enough that they consumed the Macedonian lands. These new depraved creatures, spawned by Western greed, consumed all Macedonian treasures such as history, culture, religion, literature, folklore, ancient knowledge stolen from Holy Mountain (Athos), etc., and regurgitated them as their own. Without hesitation, they will lie to the world, even to their own people about "their true identities", and blame their ills on the innocent. Their propaganda will turn "lies to truths" and "truths to lies" until all people are poisoned with hatred, an artificially created hatred, which will haunt Macedonians for all time and render them mute. Silence will fill the air and children will not dare cry, for if they utter anything Macedonian a terrible curse will befall them which can only be partially lifted if they leave their lands or submit to the will of their new masters. The proud name "Macedonia" which echoed through the centuries and outlasted time itself, will become a "dirty word" never to be spoken. The Macedonian language, the mother of all Slav languages, the "Voice of Eastern Christianity" will be "muted", to be spoken only in the shadows, in fear that "enemy ears" may be lurking. In time it will become known as "our language", spoken by "our people", a mute language spoken by a nameless nation. In time, the Macedonian nation, the Macedonian people, and the Macedonian language will become "an anomaly" in its ancestral land.

This is the fate that awaits the Macedonian people in the 20th century, all with the blessings of the Super Powers (Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy).

Macedonia from 1912 to 1939

The jubilation of liberation died down quickly as the fires of burning villages lit the night skies. Macedonia was in flames again. Liberators turned to occupiers and rained havoc on the Macedonian population. The political, economic, and ethnic unity of Macedonia was no more. Greek soldiers who came to liberate their Christian brothers from the oppressive Turks and terrible Bulgarians were now burning, torturing, and murdering people. In the words of Sir Edmond Grey, "The Balkan war began as a war of liberation, became rapidly a war of annexation, and has ended as a war of extermination" (page 294, Vasil Bogov, *Macedonian Revelation, Historical Documents Rock and Shatter Modern Political Ideology*).

The Greek atrocities were revealed to the world when a lost mailbag was discovered containing letters from Greek soldiers in Macedonia to their families in Greece. The mailbag was turned in to the Carnegie Relief Commission and the contents of the letters were made public. Expecting to fight for the glory of the fatherland, the soldiers, instead, found themselves torturing, murdering, burning houses, and evicting women and children from their homes in a most vile way. The letters revealed that the soldiers were acting on direct orders from the Greek authorities and the Greek king himself. Macedonian families of known Exarchists (Macedonians belonging to the Bulgarian Church) were ordered by force to "take with them what they could carry and get out". "This is Greece now and there is no place for Bulgarians here." Those who remained were forced to swear loyalty to the Greek State. Anyone refusing to take the loyalty oath was either executed, as an example of what would happen to those disloyal, or evicted from the country. To explain the mass evacuations, Greek officials claimed that the inhabitants of Macedonia left by choice or became Greek by choice. The truth is, no one was given any choice at all.

"A thousand Greek and Serbian publicists began to fill the world with their shouting about the essentially Greek or Serbian character of the populations of their different spheres. The Serbs gave the unhappy Macedonians twenty four hours to renounce their nationality and proclaim themselves Serbs, and the Greeks did the same. Refusal meant murder or expulsion. Greek and Serbian colonists were poured into the occupied country... The Greek newspapers began to talk about a Macedonia peopled entirely with Greeks-and they explained the fact that no one spoke Greek by calling the people 'Bulgaro-phone Greeks' ... the Greek army entered villages where no one spoke their language. 'What do you mean by speaking

Bulgarian?' cried the officers. 'This is Greece and you must speak Greek'" (page 104, John Shea, Macedonia and Greece, The Struggle to define a new Balkan Nation).

In 1913, professor R.A. Reiss reported to the Greek government: "Those whom you would call Bulgarian speakers I would simply call Macedonians...Macedonian is not the language they speak in Sofia...I repeat the mass of inhabitants there (Macedonia) remain simply Macedonians."

History again turned its eyes away from the Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian atrocities in Macedonia to focus on new events that were about to unfold and engulf the entire world.

After losing Bosnia and Herzegovina to Austria in 1908 and the Albanian territories in 1912 (again because of Austria), Serbia became bitter and resentful. "To the nationalist Serbs the Habsburg monarchy (Austria-Hungary) was an old evil monster which prevented their nation from becoming a great and powerful state. On June 28, 1914, a young Serbian nationalist, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated the heir of the Habsburg monarchy, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and his wife at Sarjevo" (page 104, Felix Gilbert, The End of the European Era, 1890 to the Present).

Within two weeks of the assassination the First World War broke out, engulfing all of Europe. It was inevitable and a matter of time before a "world war" would break out in the Balkans. The Super Powers were incapable of exercising diplomacy either between themselves or with the new Balkan States they helped create. Macedonia was sacrificed in order to appease the new Balkan states but that did little to satisfy their ferocious appetites for lands and loot.

While World War I raged on consuming the lives of millions of young men and women, Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia were serving their own brand of chauvinism in Macedonia. For the next five years, with the world busy with its own problems, there was no one to hear the cries of the Macedonian people at the hands of the new tyrants. If the gravestones of the dead Macedonians could speak they would tell tales of torture and executions, deception and lies. They would say, "Our Christian brothers came to liberate us but instead they killed us because we were in their way of achieving greatness. We were labeled 'criminals' because we would not yield to their demands. I ask you is it a crime to want to live as free men? Is it a crime to want to be Macedonian? Is it a crime to want to exercise free will? It is they who are the criminals for befouling everything that is Christian, for their lies and deception, and for murdering us to possess our lands. History will record August 10th, 1913 as the darkest day in Macedonia, the day our future died".

The triple occupation worsened living conditions in Macedonia but the fighting spirit of the Macedonian people continued to live underground and abroad. Three generations of fighting for liberty, freedom, and an independent Macedonia came to a close. The Ilinden generation and IMRO were defeated, not by the Turks or Muslim oppression but by Christian cruelty and deception.

Soon after the occupation, underground societies sprang up everywhere urging the Macedonian people to refuse their new fate and oppose the partition. Accordingly, many Macedonians did so by refusing to obey the new officialdom and by not participating in the new institutions. This, however, did not stop the military regimes, occupying Macedonia, from systematic denationalization and violent assimilation.

The battle for "dominion of the world", which started over Balkan affairs, soon took a sinister turn to again involve Macedonia. As the Entente Powers (Britain, France, Russia, and Italy) were fighting with the Central Powers (Germany and Austro-Hungary), Bulgaria, smarting from her losses at Bucharest, remained neutral. In a turn of events, to the amazement of the Greeks, the Entente Powers approached Bulgaria with an offer of a substantial portion of Macedonian territory in exchange for her alliance. Bulgaria, however, seemed to prefer the company of the Central Powers, perhaps they offered her a bigger portion, because by late 1915, her armies marched in and invaded Macedonia. To quote the Bulgarian War Minister General Nikolaev "We care little about the British, Germans, French, Russians, Italians, Austrians or Hungarians; our only thought is Macedonia. Whichever of the two groups of Powers will enable us to conquer it will have our alliance!" (page 154, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

While the Serbs were being engaged on their northern border, the Greeks were debating which side to take. Their hesitation or "National Schism", as it was later called, lay in the differences that

emerged between the Greek Prime Minister Venizelos and the Greek King Constantine I, over which side to join. Venizelos was a strong supporter of the Entente and within days of the outbreak of hostilities, was ready to offer Greek troops to fight alongside the Entente. King Constantine, on the other hand, did not share Venizelos's zeal and believed that Greek policies would be best served by staying neutral. Being married to Sofia, the sister of Kaiser Wilhelm II, however, predisposed Constantine towards the Central Powers. The tug of war between Prime Minister and King divided the people of Greece into two camps and the country slid towards a state of virtual civil war. Having the authority to do so, Constantine replaced Venizelos with a pro-German Prime Minister and called for an election to end the impasse. Unfortunately for the King, Venizelos, once again, came out victorious with a clear majority. Bulgaria's attack on Serbia, however, due to a Greek-Serbian treaty, predisposed Greece to offer Serbia assistance. The king's camp refused to comply on the grounds that it was not Bulgaria alone who was committing the aggression and insisted on remaining neutral. Venizelos, on the other hand, called on Parliament and won support to send Greek troops to fight alongside the Serbs and to allow landings of Entente troops in the Solun region. Venizelos was again forced to resign. "But whatever the constitutional rights and wrongs of the situation Venizelos's second resignation on 5 October 1915 signified a total breakdown in relations between the king and his elected prime minister. Britain and France, however, had not yet given up Greece for lost and held out to Venizelos's successor, Alexander Zaimis, the prospect of the cession of Cyprus to Greece in return for aid to Serbia, whose forces were now under severe pressure" (page 109, Richard Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece*).

Soon afterwards, Zaimis too was forced to resign. New elections were held in December but were boycotted by the Venizelos camp. Events came to a head when the Royalists refused to allow evacuated Serbian troops to cross over from Corfu and join the Entente forces on the Solun front. Backed by the Entente, a group of pro-Venizelos officers launched a coup in Solun against the official government and created a provisional pro-Entente government with its own army. Once again many Macedonians, deceived by Balkan propaganda, joined the war with hopes of being liberated only to end up as "cannon fodder" used by both sides at the front. Macedonian casualties mounted and towns and villages only recently reconstructed were again bombarded to dust.

Soon after establishing the Solun front, the occupation of Greece was complete. France had dispatched 60,000 troops to the Balkans with hopes of safeguarding the Skopje to Solun rail links. By late 1917, Entente troops were emerging victorious over the Bulgarians and Germans in Macedonia. No sooner was the battle over than a problem developed between British and French commands in Macedonia. While the British General, Milne, supported Venizelos and his attempts to constitute a pro-British provisional government in Greece, the pro-Macedonian French General, Sarrail, opposed Venizelos and sought to drive the Greek army out of Macedonia. "The ambitious plan for Macedonian autonomy drafted by the French command in 1915 and 1916 were but mere progressive steps to ensure France a strategic outpost for capital expansion" (page 155, Radin, *IMRO and the Macedonian Question*).

Once again, Macedonians were caught in the middle of someone else's war. To save face, France recalled Sarrail and replaced him with a pro-Greek commander, thus avoiding a diplomatic disaster.

After establishing a government in Athens and consolidating his power in Greece, Venizelos committed nine divisions to the Macedonian front to assist Entente forces on the Solun front. To further prove his devotion to the Entente, Venizelos committed two more divisions to fight the Bolsheviks in Russia.

When the war was over, on November 11, 1918, a general armistice was signed and a Peace Conference was convened in Versailles, France. Venizelos arrived in Paris as the principle negotiator for Greece, determined to reap his reward for his solid support to his victorious allies. One of Venizelos's objectives was to resurrect the "Megaly Idea" by annexing parts of Asia Minor, Smyrna (Ismir) in particular. He convinced the world that the Christians living in Asia Minor were Greek and should be part of Greece. Unfortunately for Venizelos, Italy had prior claims in Asia Minor (Anatolia) which created a problem for the peacemakers. Greek ambition was viewed with suspicion by Italy so to strengthen her claims, in March 1919 Italy began to build up troops in the region. The Greeks viewed this as a threat to their own claim and before a final territorial solution was reached, they demanded concessions. The

reasons given were that the Greek people in Asia Minor were endangered by Turkish aggression and needed protection. After much protest on the Greek side, Britain, France, and the Americans finally gave them permission to send a small defense force. Under the protection of allied warships, on May 15, 1919, Greek troops began their landing in Smyrna. Instead of staying put however, as per prior agreements, they began to occupy Western Asia Minor.

No sooner were the Central Powers driven out of Greek territories than the Greek Government, by passing LAW 1051, inaugurated a new administrative jurisdiction for governing the newly acquired lands in Macedonia.

When it started to become clear that the Entente Powers were winning the war, encouraged by Woodrow Wilson's principles of nationality, many Macedonian lobby groups placed their faith in the Peace Conference in Versailles. Wilson's fourteen principles of nationality implicitly asserted the right of all nations to self-determination.

In his address to the Pan Slavic Assembly in Odessa in August 1914, Krste Misirkov called for achieving autonomy by diplomatic means. An article was written and extensively circulated in May 1915, which specifically dealt with the autonomy call.

The student organization "Independent Society", in Geneva Switzerland under the slogan of "Macedonia for the Macedonians", demanded the application of Wilson's principles to create an autonomous Macedonia based on the principles of the Swiss Federative model.

Remnants of IMRO also took action in the rally for an Autonomous Macedonia. After the Bulgarians murdered Yane Sandanski in 1915, his supporters fled the Pirin region to save their own lives and later regrouped in Serres to form the "Serres Revolutionary Council". "Having noted the impetus for unification of the Southern Slavs against the Central Powers, the Council issued a 'Declaration of Autonomy' in October 1918, in which it appealed for membership of a Balkan Federation on the basis of Macedonian territorial integrity. This plea was ultimately rejected by the ruling cliques of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which later became known as Yugoslavia". "By striving for political and economic hegemony over the Balkans, Balkan nationalism has thrown the Balkan peoples and states into deep contradictions and conflicts which must be begun by war, and finished by war and always war" (pages 158-159, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

Once again the Macedonian people came to the forefront to plead their case and once again they were shut out. How many more wars must be fought and how much more blood must be spilled for the world to realize that there is no end to Balkan conflicts without involving the Macedonian people in resolving the Macedonian question?

The Peace Conference, which was supposedly "the tribunal of international conscience", had no place for "Wilsonian Justice" or the opportunity for self-determination. Instead of practicing what they preached, the so called "peace makers of Versailles" rewarded aggression in exchange for self-interest.

With the stroke of a pen, in 1919 at the Treaty of Versailles (Paris), England and France sealed Macedonia's fate by ratifying the principles of the Bucharest Treaty and officially endorsing the partitioning of Macedonia. This gave Greece the license she needed to pursue forced expulsion and denationalization of Macedonians and to begin a mass colonization by transplanting "potential Greeks" into the annexed territories of Macedonia. The Neuilly Convention allowed for forced exchanges of populations. About 70,000 Macedonians were expelled from the Greek occupied part of Macedonia to Bulgaria and 25,000 "so called Greeks" were transplanted from Bulgaria to Greek occupied Macedonia.

"Macedonia's fate has been the subject of every kind of political combination, negotiation and treaty since 1912, each more immoral than the last, each ignoring completely the local interests and desires of a population which, with the stroke of the statesman's pen, can be condemned to national dissolution, and denied the right to a free national life while Armenians, Albanians and Jews receive political freedom" (page 160, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

The Super Powers did not dare lose the strategic importance and untapped wealth in Macedonia or dare disappoint their trusted allies in the Balkans. Think of the endless bickering and complaining!

What was surprising, especially to the Balkan delegation, was the raising of the Macedonian question by Italy. On July 10, 1919, Italy along with the USA made a proposal to the "Committee for the

Formation of New States" for Macedonian autonomy. France flatly opposed the motion while Britain proposed establishing a five-year Macedonian Commissary under the auspices of the League of Nations. Greece and Serbia, by refusing to acknowledge the existence of a Macedonian question, literally killed the motion.

Another item that came out of Versailles was Article 51, the League of Nations' code to "protect national minorities". Article 51 of the Treaty of Versailles espouses equality of civil rights, education, language, and religion for all national minorities. Unfortunately, article 51 was never implemented by the Balkan States or enforced by the League of Nations which Greece and Bulgaria, to this day, violate and ignore. Why is this? Because to this day, Greece and Bulgaria claim that "the Macedonian nationality" does not exist and has never existed. So, what minorities should they be protecting? In response to the Greek claim I would like to ask the Greeks the following questions:

1. To what minorities were you referring, when on September 29, 1924 your Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikolaos Mihalakopoulou signed an agreement with the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Kalkoff?
2. To what minorities were you referring, when on August 17, 1926 you made an agreement with Yugoslavia regarding the nationality of the "Slavophones in Greece?" (Pages 159-161, G.A.L. I Kata Tis Makedonias Epivouli, (Ekdosis Deftera Sympleliromeni), Athinai 1966).

On September 29, 1924, Greece signed an agreement with Bulgaria declaring that the Macedonians in Greece were Bulgarians. Not to disappoint the Serbians, when they found out about the Greek-Bulgarian agreement, the Greeks changed their mind and on August 17, 1926, declared that the Macedonians in Greece were in reality, Serbs.

As it turned out, the loudly proclaimed "Wilson principles" at the Paris Conference were only for show. The real winners at the end of the conference were the "players", the biggest one of all being Venizelos of Greece. "The entire forum was a farce, and its offspring the Versailles Treaty, the ultimate insult to the dignity and self-esteem (what remained of it after continuous war and bloodshed) of the long-tormented Macedonian people. Those Macedonians prodded by conscience, by the mistrust gained after generations of suffering, and by the desire for freedom, thereafter treated the Versailles Treaty, and all political treaties, with the contempt they deserve" (page 166, Radin, IMRO and the Macedonian Question).

At the conclusion of the Treaty, Greece got back what she had previously annexed and, additionally, received a large portion of Epirus, Western Thrace, Crete, and the Aegean Islands. It is important to mention here that when Albania's affirmation for independence was signed, at the London Conference in February 1920, more of Macedonia's territory was partitioned. A narrow strip of land running through Lake Ohrid and southward along Macedonia's western boundary was awarded to Albania.

Soon after arriving victorious in Greece, Venizelos, in a speech in Solun, announced his plans for a "Greater Greece" (Megali Idea) and to bring together all "Greek peoples" under a single Greater Greek State.

I remember, as a child, listening to old men in my village, sitting on the porch telling tales of bygone wars when, as young soldiers, they chased the Turks to Ankara yelling "two Turks to a bayonet". They also told stories of how it took them sixty days to gain sixty miles and how they lost them in one day of retreat. I didn't understand what they were talking about then but it was about the Greek exploits in Asia Minor. As I mentioned earlier, after building up a large military presence in Asia Minor, a major offensive was launched in March 1921, and by the end of the summer, the Greek armies reached the Sakarya River about forty miles from Ankara.

The assault on Asia Minor was an "exclusively Greek initiative" without the blessing of the Entente Powers and as a result they found themselves alone and running out of ammunition. They knew they couldn't count on Italy or France for help but the realization of their predicament sunk in when Britain also refused to help them. By early autumn the Greeks were pushed back beyond the halfway point between Smyrna and Ankara, reaching an uneasy military stalemate. Realizing that they couldn't possibly win militarily or politically, the Greeks turned to the Paris Conference of March 1922 looking

for a compromise. The compromise called for the withdrawal of the Greek armies and placing the Christian population under the protection of the League of Nations. Sensing a victory, Mustafa Kemal of Turkey insisted on an unconditional evacuation of the Greek forces, a demand unacceptable to the Greeks. Still counting on British kindness, in July 1922, the Greeks unsuccessfully attempted to get permission from their allies to enter Tsari Grad (Istanbul).

Turkey launched a full-scale offensive on August 26, 1922 (a dark day for Greece and her Megali Idea), near Afyonkarahisar and forced the Greeks into a hasty retreat back to Smyrna. On September 8, the Greek army was evacuated and the next day, the Turkish army invaded Smyrna. The worst came on the evening of the 9th, when outbreaks of killing and looting began followed by a massacre of the Christian population, in which 30,000 Christians, mostly Armenians, perished. As a result of the violence 250,000 people fled to the waterfront to escape the catastrophic disaster.

The Asia Minor campaign was over, along with the "Megali Idea" of a Greater Greece. Worse yet, as a result of this catastrophic Greek fiasco, over one million Turkish Christians were displaced, most of them into Macedonia. Their settlement affected the demography of the Macedonian landscape as well as the morale of the Macedonian population.

An entire generation of young Macedonian men, who were drafted into the Greek military, were sent to the Asia Minor campaigns and many lost their lives. The Greek authorities never acknowledged their services and no compensation was ever paid to the families of those "breadwinners" who lost their lives. The reason for the omission, according to the Greek authorities, "they were Bulgarian". It is, I am told, noble to die for your country. Would it not be "nobler" to die for someone else's country? How did the Greeks repay those, noble enough to die for Greece? They let their widows and children live in poverty. This is how Greece treated its noblest citizens!

By the Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923, the Greco-Turkish war came to an end. Greece and Turkey signed a population exchange agreement using "religion as the basic criterion for nationality" (page 120, Richard Clogg, A Short History of Modern Greece).

The November 1925 issue of National Geographic Magazine best illustrates the magnitude of the human wave, the audacity of the Greek and Turkish authorities and the total disregard for human life. "History's Greatest Trek, Tragedy Stalks the Near East as Greece and Turkey Exchange Two Million of their People. ...1922 began what may fairly be called history's greatest, most spectacular trek-the compulsory intermigration of two million Christians and Muslims across the Aegean Sea." "...the initial episodes of the exchange drama were enacted to the accompaniment of the boom of cannon and the rattle of machine gun and with the settings pointed by the flames of the Smyrna holocaust" (page 533, Melville Chater, National Geographic, November 1925).

"Stroke of the Pen Exiles 3,000,000 People. It is safe to say that history does not contain a more extraordinary document. Never before in the world's long pageant of folk-wanderings have 2,000,000 people-and certainly no less than 3,000,000 if the retroactive clause is possible of complete application-been exiled and re-adopted by the stroke of the pen" (page 569, National Geographic, November 1925). "Even if regarded as a voluntary trek instead of a compulsory exchange, the movement would be without parallel in the history of emigration." "One might just add that history has never produced a document more difficult of execution. It was to lessen these difficulties that exchangeability was based in religion and not race. Due to five centuries of Turkish domination in Greece, the complexities in determining an individual's racial status are often such as would make a census taker weep" (page 570, National Geographic, November 1925).

"Greece with one-fifth Turkey's area has 1,500,000 more people. Turkey with a population of 5,000,000 and naturally rich territory contains only 15 people to the square mile...Greece, with less than one fifth of Turkey's area, emerges with a population exceeding the latter's for the first time by 1,500,000 people averaging 123 to the square mile" (page 584, National Geographic, November 1925).

"History's Greatest Trek has cost 300,000 lives. Conservative estimates place it at 300,000 lives lost by disease and exposure" (page 584, National Geographic, November 1925).

"The actual exchange was weighted very heavily in Turkey's favour, for some 380,000 Muslims were exchanged for something like 1,100,000 Christians." "The total population in Greece rose between

1907 and 1928 from 2,600,000 to 6,200,000." "After the Greek advances of 1912, for instance, the Greek elements in Greek Macedonia had constituted 43 percent of the population. By 1926, with the resettlement of the refugees, the Greek element has risen to 89 percent" (page 121, Richard Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece*).

After all this, surprisingly (and shamefully) Greece still claims her population to be homogeneous; direct descendants of the peoples of the ancient City States.

"If Greece exists today as a homogeneous ethnos, she owes this to [the Asia Minor Catastrophe]. If the hundreds of thousands of refugees had not come to Greece, Greek Macedonia would not exist today. The refugees created the national homogeneity of our country. (Antonios Kandiotis, Metropolit of Florina, page 141 in Anastasia Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood*).

According to Karakasidou, almost half of the refugees were settled in urban centers and rural areas in Macedonia. "Searching for locations in which to settle this mass of humanity, the Greek government looked north to the newly incorporated land in Macedonia..." "...by 1930, 90 percent of the 578,844 refugees settled in rural Greece were concentrated in the regions of Macedonia and western Thrace. Thus Macedonia, Greece's newly acquired second 'breadbasket' (after Thessaly), became the depository for East Thracian, Pontic, and Asia Minor refugees" (page 145, Anastasia Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood*).

While Greece was contemplating repopulating Macedonia with alien refugees, new developments were boiling to the surface in Macedonia.

"A book of great importance to Macedonian linguistics and historiography was published in Athens; that was the primer entitled ABECEDAR (A B C), printed in the Latin alphabet, and intended for the children of the Macedonian national minority in Greece - the 'Slav speaking minority' as Sir Austin Chamberlain, British diplomat and delegate to the League of Nations, and Sir James Erick Drumond, General Secretary to the League of Nations, referred to the Macedonians in Greece" (page 184, Voislav Kushevski, 'On the Appearance of the Abecedar' in *Istorija* magazine, 1983, No. 2).

"In 1920 Greece signed before the League of Nations a treaty obliging it to grant certain rights to the minorities of non-Greek origin in Greece. Four years later, in 1924, at the suggestion of the League of Nations, Greece and Bulgaria signed the well-known Kalfov-Politis Protocol under which Bulgaria was obliged to grant the Greek minority in Bulgaria their minority rights (language, schools and other rights), while Greece, recognizing the Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia as a 'Bulgarian' minority, was to grant them their minority rights. This agreement was seemingly very much in favour of Bulgaria, but when in 1925 the Greek government undertook certain concrete steps towards the publication of the first primer made for the specific needs of that minority, it made it clear that there were no grounds on which Bulgaria could be officially interested in any 'Bulgarian minority' or expect the primer to be in Bulgarian, for that minority - though speaking a Slav language - was neither Bulgarian nor Serbian.

The very fact that official Greece did not, either de jure or do facto, see the Macedonians as a Bulgarian minority, but rather as a separate Slav group ('Slav speaking minority'), is of particular significance. The primer, published in the Latin alphabet, was based on the Lerin - Bilola dialect. After Gianelli's Dictionary dating from the 16th Century, and the Daniloviot Cetirijazicnik written in the 19th century, this was yet another book written in the Macedonian vernacular. The primer was mailed to some regions in Western Aegean-Macedonia (Kostur, Lerin and Voden), and the school authorities prepared to give Macedonian children, from the first to the fourth grade of the elementary school, instruction in their own mother tongue (Grigorios Dafnis, 'Greece between the two world wars', 'Elefteria' newspaper, March 15, 1953, Dionisios Romas in 'Elefteria' newspaper of October 9 and 12, 1954 and Dimitrios Vazuglis in *Racial and religious minorities in Greece and Bulgaria*, 1954).

The Greek governments, however, have never made a sincere attempt to solve the question of the Macedonians and their ethnic rights in Greece. Thus, while measures were being undertaken for the opening of Macedonian schools, a clash between the Greek and the Bulgarian armies at Petrich was concocted, which was then followed by a massacre of the innocent Macedonian population in the village of Trlis near Serres, all this with the aim of creating an attitude of insecurity within the Macedonians, so that they would themselves give up the recognition of their minority rights, and eventually seek safety by

moving to Bulgaria. The Greek governments also skillfully used the Yugoslav-Bulgarian disagreements on the question of the Macedonians in Greece, and with organized pressure on the Macedonian population, as was the case in the village of Trlis, tried to dismiss the Macedonian ethnic question from the agenda through forced resettlement of the Macedonian population outside of Greece. The ABECEDAR, which actually never reached the Macedonian children, is in itself a powerful testimony not only of the existence of the large Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece, but also of the fact that Greece was under an obligation before the League of Nations to undertake certain measures in order to grant this particular minority their rights" (HRISTO ANDONOVSKI).

Even before Greece had secured her grip on Macedonia, officials were sent to administer "the new lands". The first official Greek administrator arrived in Solun near the end of October 1912, accompanied by two judges, five customs officials, ten consulate clerks, a contingent of reporters and journalists, and 168 Cretan soldiers. Among other things, the first order of business was to "Hellenize the New Lands". "After the Greeks occupied Aegean Macedonia, they closed the Slavic language schools and churches and expelled the priests. The Macedonian language and names were forbidden, and the Macedonians were referred to as Bulgarians, Serbians or natives. By law promulgated on November 21, 1926, all place names (toponymia) were Hellenized; that is the names of cities, villages, rivers and mountains were discarded and Greek names put in their place. At the same time the Macedonians were forced to change their first and surnames; every Macedonian surname had to end in 'os', 'es', or 'poulos'. The news of these acts and the new, official Greek names were published in the Greek government daily 'Efimeris tis Kiverniseos no. 322 and 324 of November 21 and 23, 1926. The requirements to use these Greek names is officially binding to this day. All evidence of the Macedonian language was compulsorily removed from churches, monuments, archeological finds and cemeteries. Slavonic church or secular literature was seized and burned. The use of the Macedonian language was strictly forbidden also in personal communication between parents and children, among villagers, at weddings and work parties, and in burial rituals" (page 109, John Shea, Macedonia and Greece, The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation).

The act of forbidding the use of the Macedonian language in Greece is best illustrated by an example of how it was implemented in the Township of Assarios (Giuevzna). Here is a quote from Karakasidou's book Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood.

"[We] listened to the president articulate to the council that in accordance with the decision [#122770] of Mr. Minister, General Governor of Macedonia, all municipal and township councils would forbid, through [administrative] decisions, the speaking of other idioms of obsolete languages within the area of their jurisdiction for the reconstitution of a universal language and our national glory. [The president] suggested that [the] speaking of different idioms, foreign [languages] and our language in an impure or obsolete manner in the area of the township of Assirios would be forbidden. Assirios Township Decision No. 134, 13 December 1936" (page 162, Anastasia Karakasidou, Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood).

By 1928, 1,497 Macedonian place-names in the Greek occupied Macedonia were Hellenized (LAW 4096) and all Cyrillic inscriptions found in churches, on tombstones, and icons were destroyed (or overwritten) prompting English Journalist V. Hild to say, "The Greeks do not only persecute living Slavs (Macedonians)..., but they even persecute dead ones. They do not leave them in peace even in the graves. They erase the Slavonic inscriptions on the headstones, remove the bones and burn them."

In the years following World War I, the Macedonian people underwent extensive measures of systematic denationalization. The applications of these "denationalization schemes" were so extensive and aggressively pursued that in the long term, they eroded the will of the Macedonian people to resist.

"In Greece, in 1929 during the rule of Elepeterios Venizelos, a legal act was issued 'On the protection of public order'. In line with this Act each demand for nationality rights is regarded as high treason. This law is still in force.

On December 18, 1936, Metaksas' dictatorial government issued a legal Act 'On the activity against state security' on the strength of which thousands of Macedonians were arrested, imprisoned,

expelled or exiled (EXORIA) on arid, inhospitable Greek islands, where many perished. Their crime? Being ethnic Macedonian by birth.

On September 7, 1938 legal Act No. 2366 was issued banning the use of the Macedonian language. All Macedonian localities were flooded with posters: 'Speak Greek'. Evening schools were opened in which adult Macedonians were taught Greek. Not a single Macedonian school functioned at the time" (page 8, What Europe has Forgotten: The Struggle of the Aegean Macedonians, A Report by the Association of the Macedonians in Poland).

Many Macedonians were fined, beaten, and jailed for speaking Macedonian. Adults and school children alike were further humiliated by being forced to drink castor oil when caught speaking Macedonian.

In Vardar Macedonia, the Yugoslav government attacked the problem of denationalization and assimilation by enacting laws, such as the September 24, 1920 "Resolution for the Settlement of the New Southern Regions", designed to effectively exclude Macedonians from owning any property. The Macedonian language was banned along with cultural institutions through a uniform code known as the December 30th, 1920 EDICT, which was aimed at persecuting all political and trade union associations.

The bulk and most arable of Macedonian lands were awarded to Serbian army officers who survived the World War I Solun front. Land was also awarded to the Serbian administrators of Macedonia including government bureaucrats, judges, and the police. The denationalization measures were complemented with aggressive re-education programs producing "little Serbs" out of the Macedonian children. As for the unwilling adults, they were given two options - "live as a Serb" or "die as a Macedonian"!

In Pirin Macedonia, the Bulgarian government enforced compulsory name changes and, through repressive political and economic means, stepped up the assimilation process. Initially, land reforms favoured the poor, including the Macedonian peasants. Later, however, that too changed and Macedonians here were exposed to a similar fate as the Macedonians in Aegea and Vardar.

The Macedonians in Albania, posed little threat to Albania's authority, and fared relatively better than their kin in Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia. The village inhabitants were not persecuted or subjected to any comprehensive denationalization programs. As a result, the Macedonian culture flourished, original names remained, and the people spoke Macedonian uninhibited.

As mentioned earlier, many of the IMRO regional leaders, fooled by the Balkan League's propaganda, voluntarily joined the League's armies in 1912 to help oust the Turks and liberate Macedonia. When it was over and the so-called "liberation" turned into an "occupation", they found themselves prisoners of the League's soldiers. Those fortunate enough to have escaped, fled to the Pirin region and joined Yane Sandanski's Cheta, which was still active at the time. After Sandanski's assassination in 1915, however, many of his followers went underground and later re-emerged in Serres to form the "Serres Revolutionary Council". The left wing of IMRO re-emerged prior to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference with high hopes of settling the Macedonian question by lobbying the peace delegates. After realizing that their efforts were futile, they gave up and merged together with the Provisional Mission of Western Macedonia to form IMRO (United). Macedonia is alive, "United" in spirit if not in substance. Unfortunately, because of Macedonia's division and the impenetrable barriers erected, putting up a united national front was difficult if not impossible. Even though there was much desire to achieve a 'united autonomous Macedonia', no form of mobilization was practical. So how was IMRO going to achieve its objectives? Some leaders believed that by internationalizing the Macedonian question and by working with the supportive political elements of each Balkan State, the denationalization process could be slowed down, even reversed, and a climate for reunification created. The barriers erected in Macedonia, IMRO believed, could be penetrated by employing new, revolutionary, and non-nationalistic tactics. By joining the "international class struggle against a common oppressor", IMRO believed self-determination could be achieved. The only political elements that sympathized with IMRO's objectives, at the time, were the Communist Parties of the respective Balkan States. IMRO called on the Macedonian people to join the class struggle and support those sympathetic to the Macedonian cause. Many Macedonians did rise to the task but found they had very little in common with the exploited working

class in their respective new countries. Macedonians felt they were exploited first because they were Macedonians and second because they were a working class. To win them over, the Communist International (Comintern) was obliged to consider concessions, like offering Macedonians autonomy and the right to self-determination or at least recognize the Macedonian nation with full rights and privileges. The Comintern saw the Macedonians as a potentially strong ally that could be persuaded to rally for its cause. Unfortunately, there were problems, many problems. First, there were disagreements between the various Balkan State Communist Parties regarding the degree of concessions to be awarded. Then there were fears of losing Macedonian territory, if autonomy was considered. Moscow, the leading Comintern figure, favoured a Balkan Federation with the whole of Macedonia as one of its republics. Bulgaria, unfortunately, still dreaming the San Stefano dream, backed out of the deal.

Without a way of breaking the "artificial impenetrable barriers" imposed on Macedonia by the Balkan States, IMRO was never again able to rise to the glory days of the Ilinden Rebellion. As a consequence, its role slowly diminished and it became extinct after the German occupation of the Balkans in 1941.

After the Great War there was peace in Europe. Unfortunately, Macedonians continued to endure denationalization, forced assimilation, forced emigration, and economic neglect at the hands of the new masters. As time will tell, Europe will not have a lasting peace, a new menace with greater ferocity is emerging and will engulf the entire world. Once again someone else's war will be fought on Macedonian soil and once again it will prove even more devastating, almost fatal to the Macedonian people.

Macedonia from 1939 to 1949 WWII & The Greek Civil War

After the conclusion of the Great War and the Soviet Bolshevik revolution, the Super Powers were in ruins and began their lengthy process of rebuilding. Russia's desires for imperialist ventures and her obsession with destroying the Ottoman Empire brought immense economic suffering to her people. While the Macedonians in the Balkans were suffering from denationalization and oppression, the world around them was changing.

Lenin's rise to power put an end to Russian imperialist ambitions in the Balkans, especially the Tsarist desires for annexing Tsari Grad (Constantinople) and Endrene (Macedonian Dardanelles). Germany, on the other hand, bitter about her latest defeat, began to rebuild her economy. Smarting from their latest bouts with Germany, France and Britain too began to rebuild their economies and military strengths. Germany, as the vanquished party and instigator of the Great War, was forced to pay restitution for damages to the victorious nations.

In spite of all efforts made to recover from the Great War, the economic situation in Europe was worsening and came to a climax in October 1929 when the stock market crashed in the United States. The economic collapse of the 1930's and the "Great Depression" polarized the world into "left and right" economic camps. On the left were the supporters of the working class and Communism, while on the right were the supporters of industry and capitalism. The tug of war between left and right came to a climax when civil war broke out in Spain in July 1936. Germany was in support of the right and sent troops to fight on the side of the Spanish Government. Germany, at the time, was only allowed to have a small army, so to compensate for her limited numerical capability she focused her efforts on producing a superior force. Germany's small but capable army was field-tested and battle hardened in the Spanish conflict. This explains her numerous victories during the course of World War II. Russian and German influences did not escape the Balkan States and they too felt the pull from the two camps.

To maintain control of his kingdom, King George II of Greece made his state a dictatorship. In 1936, after the Greek premier's death General Metaxas, minister of war, was appointed to take charge of Greek affairs.

While there were some prospects for basic human rights for the Macedonian people in the Greek State in the early 1920's, those prospects died as Greece tightened her grip on Macedonia by implementing more racist assimilation policies. If that was not enough, on December 18, 1936 the Greek

Government issued a legal act concerning, "Activities Against State Security". By this act thousands of Macedonians were arrested, imprisoned, and expelled from their homeland. Among other things Metaxas, on September 7, 1938, by legal act 2366, outlawed the Macedonian language and prohibited people from speaking it by imposing heavy fines and imprisonment.

In 1938 Australian author Bert Birtles in his book "Exiles in the Aegean" wrote, "In the name of 'Hellenization' these people (Macedonians) are being persecuted continually and arrested for the most fantastic reasons. Metaxa's way of inculcating the proper nationalist spirit among them has been to change all the native place-names into Greek and to forbid use of the native language. For displaying the slightest resistance to the edict-for this too is a danger to the security of the State-peasants and villagers have been exiled without trial" (page 112, John Shea, Macedonia and Greece The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation).

Once in control of the Greek State, Metaxas acted against the labour unions and their leaders and declared strikes illegal. He then turned to suppressing all political opposition, outlawed all political parties, and imprisoned leaders who would not pledge their loyalty to him. The communist party too was outlawed and driven underground. The press was also heavily censored.

Being a military man, Metaxas dedicated much of the State's finances to modernizing the Greek army in both manpower and military hardware. In the sphere of education, he re-wrote the Greek history to support his own ideologies declaring that there were three great periods in history: classical, Byzantine and his own regime, which was then known as the "Regime of the Fourth of August". He created a National Youth Organization to bring children together from various social classes and provided military training for boys and domestic skills for girls. Even though the Metaxa regime was ideologically similar to that of Spain and Italy, the Greeks were always loyal to Britain.

In Yugoslavia, events were progressing in a similar manner to those in Greece. After King Alexander declared himself dictator of Yugoslavia in 1929, he suspended the constitution and subdivided his kingdom in such a way that the Serbs would be a majority in all districts. He also abolished trade unions and removed personal liberties. The Serbian occupied territory of Macedonia was referred to as "South Serbia" and the Macedonian language was forbidden from being spoken in public. The history of the Macedonian people and their surnames were changed as well, to give Serbian emphasis. Place names too were changed and replaced with historically Serbian names. Unlike the Metaxa regime, after the 1930's, the Yugoslav regimes began to relax their tight grip and allowed unofficial and limited use of the Macedonian dialects to be spoken in the streets of Macedonia and in plays and drama clubs.

In Bulgaria, events followed a similar course as in Yugoslavia and Greece. A military coup was imposed in May 1934, the 1879 constitution was abolished, and political organizations and trade unions were suppressed. In 1935, King Boris III, in a bloodless coup, overthrew the old dictatorship and replaced it with his own Royal one. Bulgarian governments since Bulgaria's inception in 1878 have officially and adamantly denied the existence of the Macedonian nationality arguing that Macedonians are Bulgarians. Thousands of Macedonians, who over the years tried to express different views, were jailed or exiled. The attitude that Macedonians are Bulgarians was used to justify violent assimilation acts and to deny Macedonians their basic human rights. Ever since her inception in 1878, Bulgaria has been obsessed with possessing Macedonia and has caused immense suffering for the Macedonian people.

The downfall of the Tsarist Russian Imperial Empire, the break-up of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the demise of the Ottoman Empire removed three of the Super Powers from internal Balkan influence. While Britain played a less active role, France and Italy attempted to form competing alliances in the Balkans but did not have the military might to enforce them. The Balkan governments, on the other hand, for the first time had an opportunity to adjust their relations with each other and form alliances to protect their mutual interests. Unfortunately, their hatred for each other and fear of losing Macedonia always prevented such an alliance and allowed outsiders to again play a role in their internal affairs.

Germany's humiliating defeat in the Great War, coupled with her economic plight in the 1930's, gave rise to a new kind of German radicalism. Hitler exploited that and turned it to his own advantage. Hitler, in the short term, also gave the German people what they desired most, work and hope for a better

future. Unfortunately, in the long term, he delivered disaster not only to the German people but also to many other nations, including the Macedonia.

As a new-world order emerged from the Great War, new alliances began to form. On one side stood the Axis partners, initially consisting of Germany, Italy, and Japan. As war broke out, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Finland, and Thailand joined in. On the other side, the Allied partners consisted of Britain, the Soviet Union, the USA, and China. As the war progressed, more and more nations joined the allies, totaling about fifty before the war was over.

In September 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed a cooperation agreement. This basically identified their intentions with respect to each others' spheres of influence, defining their political, economic, and defense strategies as well as their obligations to each other. The agreement came to be known as the "tripartite pact".

After war broke out in the Balkans, the first to fall to fascist aggression was Albania. By an ultimatum delivered to Albanian King Zog, on March 23, 1939, Italian troops landed in Albania and occupied her territory on April 7, encountering little resistance. Soon after consolidating control in Albania, on October 28th, 1940, Italy declared war on Greece. Greece, however, turned out to be tough to defeat and Metaxa's foresight in arming his state paid off.

Official history praises Greece and Greek soldiers for their bravery and fighting spirit but neglects to mention the contributions and sacrifices Macedonians made to keep Greece safe. Macedonians were the first to be dispatched to the front lines in Albania, taking the full brunt, not only of the offensive, but also of the winter cold. More Macedonian men suffered from gangrene than from Italian bullets and bombs. Unprepared for the frigid temperatures, many men lost their fingers, toes, limbs, and even their lives to frostbite. Food too was in short supply. The brave Macedonian soldiers had to fight off starvation as well as the Italians. They did this to protect a country that refused and still refuses to recognize them.

All their sacrifices were in vain anyway because six months later, on April 6th, 1941, the German army marched into Greece. Again the Macedonians fought bravely but they were no match for the well-trained, well-disciplined German army. (If you wish to learn more about World War II, specifically about events that involved Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania, please read Volume 4 of "The Marshal Cavendish Illustrated Encyclopedia of World War II, but don't expect to find anything about the Macedonian contribution).

There is a story, I am told, of a Macedonian soldier, a real old coot, who refused to surrender to the invading Germans and continued to fire at them in spite of orders to cease. He held his position until he ran out of ammunition and the Germans practically grabbed him by the neck. Expecting to meet his maker, he stood up and bravely faced his enemy. But instead of killing him, the German soldiers, one by one, shook his hand and praised him for his bravery, then let him go. (I don't want to give you the wrong impression about the Germans. This is how they behaved in the beginning, later however, during the Partisan days, their policy was to "kill ten innocent civilians for each German soldier killed").

When the Germans reached Athens, the Greek government capitulated and the soldiers on the Albanian front were left on their own. Some were told to go to Epirus and regroup, expected to make the long trek on foot. Others were told nothing and were left to roam the countryside. Eventually they were all picked up by German patrols, disarmed, and sent home. The returning soldiers were given a hero's welcome. Unfortunately for those who were wounded and lost fingers, toes, and limbs to frostbite, there was no compensation or solace for their pain.

The German invasion was a welcome relief for the soldiers from the Italian front, but at the same time it posed an uneasy uncertainty as to what was going to happen next. No one was certain how the new invaders were going to react. The Macedonian people, having ample prior experience with being occupied, were expecting the worst. As time would show, however, the new invaders were a mixed blessing for the Macedonian people.

After war broke out in Europe, Bulgaria allied itself with the axis powers and on March 1, 1941, joined the German led pact. The entry of German troops into Bulgaria put Yugoslavia in a difficult position. To avoid German wrath, on March 25, 1941, the Yugoslav Regent, Prince Paul, also joined the German led pact. This did not sit well with young King Peter, however, who with the help of the

Yugoslav military, staged a coup and deposed the Regent. This meant that again Hitler had to negotiate with Yugoslavia. Hitler was counting on Yugoslavia to allow him passage to attack Greece. The new situation angered Hitler and instead of negotiating, he signed directive number 25 declaring Yugoslavia an enemy of Germany and ordered her destruction. Hitler wanted a swift strike so he withdrew troops from the Russian campaign.

It took Hitler's army 12 days to demolish Yugoslavia, a small diversion in his destructive career, but there are those who believe that this little diversion changed the course of history. To begin with it gave the Soviet Union just enough time to adequately prepare for an offensive, which ultimately led to Germany's defeat. Secondly, the violent nature of the attack created the right conditions for a Partisan uprising, which ultimately helped to establish the Republic of Macedonia. The battle for Yugoslavia and Greece was swift and effective. When it was over the Germans, as an ally to the axis powers, allowed Bulgaria to occupy Vardar (Yugoslav occupied) Macedonia and the eastern region of Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia. Later, after the Italians left, Germany allowed Bulgaria to occupy western Macedonia as well.

Many Macedonians, from the Vardar region, who had suffered under the Yugoslav regime, welcomed the Bulgarian invaders as saviors and liberators. Their euphoria was unfortunately short lived as the Bulgarians quickly began to oppress and forcibly Bulgarize the Macedonian population. If there had been any pro-Bulgarian sentiment before, it quickly disappeared after the occupation. Germany's violent entry into Yugoslavia, coupled with Bulgarian oppressive attitudes towards the Macedonian people, gave birth to an underground Macedonian resistance movement.

In Aegean Macedonia, after the Germans settled in, life for the Macedonian people took on an uneasy normalcy. The Greek police, who had supported the Metaxa regime before the occupation, now cooperated with the German military and again became active in Macedonia. To counter its oppressive tactics, the old Komiti (Ilinden revolutionary guard) rearmed and went back to active duty. The "old timers" were angered by Greece's oppressive laws and were spurred back into action by Bulgarian propaganda, condemning the oppressive Greek tactics. The Bulgarians were well aware of the unfavourable conditions the Greek Government had created in Macedonia and used the opportunity to agitate the Greeks. Komiti actions were limited at best and were restricted to the Italian zones, as the Germans would not tolerate armed actions in their zones.

The Partisan movement in Yugoslavia was more organized and progressive than in Greece. Led by Tito, the Communist partisans in Yugoslavia organized a war of national liberation in which the Macedonians, led by General Tempo, fought on an equal footing. Macedonians formed their own section of resistance even before they were recognized and accepted by Tito. The first anti-fascist war of national liberation began in the Republic of Macedonia on October 11, 1941. October 11th is the "Second Ilinden" for the Macedonian people. Since 1941 they have celebrated it as "Macedonian Revolution Day". The Macedonian people by their actions, loyalty, and patriotism earned their place in the world. By hardship, determination, and the spilling of blood the Macedonian people demonstrated their desire for freedom and the willingness to rule themselves. The Super Powers in 1829 (by the London Protocol) satisfied the Greeks by making Greece a country. Similarly, in 1878 (by the congress of Berlin) Russia liberated the Bulgarians making Bulgaria a country. Unlike the Greeks and Bulgarians, however, the brave people of Vardar Macedonia had to fight by themselves, for themselves to earn their place in the world among the free nations.

For just over a year the Macedonians of Vardar endured enough Bulgarian treachery to last them a lifetime. Then in April 1942, they rose up and demonstrated their displeasure. Macedonian Partisans took up arms against the Bulgarian army but were massacred in a bloody battle. Unarmed Macedonians then took to the streets to protest the massacre and they too were cut to pieces.

To escape persecution, sections of the Macedonian Partisan force in Yugoslavia fled into Aegean Macedonia. Some entered the Italian zones near the village of Besfina and the rest penetrated the German zones in the region around the village Sveta Petka and quickly went underground. The Besfina force, before it had a chance to make contact with the local population, was spotted by the Komiti who quickly sprang into action. Seeing uniformed men on the Besfina hillside startled the old Komiti. Thinking that it

was a Greek police (Andari) invasion force, the Komiti appealed to the local Italian garrison and were given arms and permission to attack. When the Komiti started the offensive, the Partisans backed off and sent representatives to negotiate. They went from village to village and spoke with the local chiefs. The strangers wore handsome uniforms and conducted themselves seriously, with charm and charisma. They spoke long and well about freedom, liberty, and the treachery of the Bulgarian Fascists.

When the Komiti found out that the uniformed men were Macedonians, they accepted them with open arms, gave them (surrendered) their weapons and many voluntarily joined their cause. The Partisans of Sveta Petka, because of a German presence, had to work under cover and they too succeeded in recruiting volunteers from the local population. After the Partisan penetration, the Macedonian people of Aegean Macedonia learned about Bulgarian atrocities and ceased to believe the Bulgarian propaganda. The old Ilinden guard was demobilized and replaced by a Partisan movement.

Partisan organizers took extraordinary measures to explain to the Macedonian people that they were fighting for the freedom and liberation of the Macedonian people from the tyranny of the oppressive states. The Macedonian involvement in this war, and later in the Greek civil war, was not about "Communist ideologies" or about alliances or obligations to the Super Powers. It was simply the next stage in the long struggle for "liberation from oppression" and to fulfill a longing for freedom, reunification, and self-rule. The Macedonian contribution to fight against Fascism is not only under emphasized, but historians also misinterpret it. I will once again say that the Macedonian people, during the Second Great War (WWII), rose on the democratic side and fought against fascism and for the liberation of the states in which they lived. The Macedonian people, like other people in the Balkans, fought to liberate their homeland and thus earn their place in the world. This cannot be ignored and must be recognized and recorded in the annals of history.

Word of a Macedonian Partisan movement in Aegean Macedonia spread like wildfire. People came out on the streets to freely speak their native Macedonian language, to sing songs, and write Macedonian plays and poetry. The Partisans even set up Macedonian schools and taught children patriotic songs, poems, and Macedonian history, using local Macedonian dialects. The younger generations, for the first time, saw written words in their beloved, sacred Macedonian language. The newfound freedom brought happiness to the lives of the oppressed Macedonian people who welcomed the Partisans into their villages as "our own boys and girls". The newfound confidence and strength projected by the Macedonians terrified the Greeks, especially the Andari and their collaborators. For a while they were no longer a threat.

The Germans and Italians did not care one way or another about Macedonian affairs as long as there was no trouble for them. Macedonian interest in Partisan activities continued to climb, bringing new recruits and volunteers to the cause. Youth organizations (NOMS) were created with young men and women recruited to be the eyes and ears of the community and to help defend the villages. Many young volunteers of military age were recruited and trained to perform policing and civic duties in the newly formed organizations. The organization SNOF (Slav Macedonian People's Liberation Front) was formed and recruited fighters from the Kostur, Lerin, and Voden regions. SNOF even cooperated with Greek organizations with similar ideologies. Later, there was talk about re-uniting Macedonia, possibly through a Balkan confederation. Britain, unfortunately, was against the idea and discouraged Greece from taking part in such matters. Bulgaria too could not agree and withdrew support. As usual, the Bulgarians wanted to become rulers of Macedonia, which was unacceptable to the Macedonians.

There is a story told that about five hundred young Macedonian civilian men gathered at the village of D'mbeni, eager to join the Partisan movement. Word of this reached the Greek Partisan leadership who appeared to be terrified at the prospect of a strong all Macedonian force. There was nothing the Greeks feared more than losing Macedonia. The Greeks by this time had formed their own Partisan movements (outside of Macedonia) and began to negotiate with the Macedonians about combining forces. For some time Greek Partisan representatives tempted the Macedonians to join them. When negotiations failed to achieve results, the Greeks tried ordering the Macedonians to surrender their arms. Macedonians were well aware of Greek treachery and refused to join them or surrender their arms. Instead they sealed the borders from Bigla to Korcha, rendering them inaccessible to the Greeks. Initially,

the Macedonians acted alone but later they joined a wing of the EAM, the Greek Popular Liberation Army.

The leadership of the Macedonian force in Western Aegean Macedonia was shared between Voivoda Ilia Dimov, code named "Goche", and our own Oshchimian Voivoda Mito Tupurkovski, code named "Titan". Both commanders were loved by their men for their fighting abilities and respected for their leadership.

I briefly want to mention, at this point, that in an ironic twist of events, while Mito Tupurkovski engaged the Germans in bitter battles, his mother Sulta was accidentally killed by a stray German bullet. It was an ordinary summer day in 1944. For some time now the local people had become accustomed to German patrols making their routine rounds, inspecting the road conditions and communication lines between Zhelevo and Breznitsa. Early each morning two German soldiers left Zhelevo on foot for Breznitsa and a pair left Breznitsa for Zhelevo. When the patrols met they reversed direction and continued this routine all day long.

On this particular day, ten Partisans came to Oshchima and decided to attack one of the patrols and take the soldiers as hostages. They set a trap in a ditch near Ternaa and sat in wait. While they were waiting, two men from Oshchima, Paso Boglev and Giro Keleshov went to a nearby mill. Paso left his donkey to graze on the road above and stepped inside the mill. When the Germans passed by they borrowed the donkey and one of them rode it as they made their way. When they reached the Partisan trap, the only armed Partisan fired a rapid-fire volley in the air. Unfortunately, after the initial burst, his gun jammed. The Germans quickly took cover in the ravine and started to fire back. Discouraged by their failed attempt, the Partisans quickly fled into the mountains. The loud gunfire alerted the German garrison in Zhelevo and reinforcements were quickly dispatched. Paso and Giro also heard the gunfire and came out of the mill to investigate. Seeing a rushing vehicle with armed soldiers headed towards them startled the two men and in panic they fled. Paso ran down to the river and hid out of sight. Giro, unfortunately, ran up the hill and was in full view of the German patrol. The Germans, thinking he was the culprit, gave chase. Giro was a fast runner and the Germans couldn't catch him so before he could disappear into the woods, one of the soldiers fired a rapid-fire volley at him. Who would have expected that a bullet from that round would mortally wound Mito's mother, Sulta, who was quietly sitting in her yard enjoying a beautiful summer's day? Giro escaped unharmed but unfortunately Sulta died from her wound on August 20th, 1944.

In September 1944 German troops began to withdraw from the Balkans. Fearing reprisals, many Macedonians evacuated their villages and set up temporary homes, secluded in the mountains. As it turned out, the Germans were not a threat and after a month or so villagers returned to their homes. The people who lived near main roads were afraid to return and took up residence with relatives in secluded villages and stayed there until all the Germans were gone. There was one incident that I know of where the Germans did do damage. This was in the Village of Ternaa where returning Germans found their "host village" empty, became enraged, and stoned two old people to death.

To protect soldiers from being attacked out in the open at night, the Germans assigned them residences inside the villages, among the locals. Each house was identified with a marker and returning soldiers used it for shelter. In Oshchima, as in other villages, identification numbers were stamped on the outside door of each house. Time and time again the same soldiers came back to the same house. According to stories my family told me, several German soldiers used to spend the night at our house. When someone was missing, my grandfather would motion "what happened" and point in the direction where the man had last sat. The Germans would then motion back "sleep", meaning that he was killed or would say "mama" for gone home on leave to visit his family.

After all the German and Bulgarian occupying forces withdrew from Yugoslavia, the Partisans, numbering about 800,000, were in full control. There were no outside invasion forces (Allied or Russian) inside Yugoslavia, so foreign interference was not a problem. At that time the Macedonian Partisans possessed a sizeable force and wielded considerable influence in the ranks of the Tito regime. The Macedonian people did their share of fighting for the liberation of Yugoslavia from the Fascists and earned their place as equals among the Yugoslav people.

On August 2nd 1944, Macedonia was officially proclaimed a Republic within the Yugoslav Federation. A Bitola-Lerin dialect was chosen and adopted as the official language of the Republic and the city of Skopje was chosen as the new Republic's capital.

No sooner had the Germans withdrawn from Greece than the British military arrived in Athens. Athens was evacuated on October 12, 1944 and a British occupation force entered the city a few days later. While Britain entered Greece with only four thousand troops, most unfit for combat, ELAS (Greek Partisans) in contrast had seventy thousand men armed and ready for combat. Even the British admit that if the Greek Partisans wanted to, they could have seized power. The conditions were certainly right. The question is why didn't they, and what was the Civil War all about? Official history provides no answers, only more questions.

It took the British a couple of months to get organized and by mid December 1944, they had fifty thousand soldiers of their own and some loyal Greek troops to back them. The local Greek troops came from the ranks of the Andari (National Republican Greek League), the same men who fought alongside the Germans. They switched their German gear for British uniforms and they were back on the streets again attacking the Partisans.

As Greece started to collapse, before Germany invaded in 1941, King George II fled and formed a government in exile in London, which was recognized by the Allies as the official Government of Greece. Also, the British in advance of the German departure established a center of Greek activity in Cairo where a Greek army, navy, and air force operated under British command.

After the British consolidated power in Greece, they were able to support the British appointed Greek Government and ordered the Partisans to demobilize. What is interesting here is that before the British were able to militarily enforce a disarmament they ordered the Partisan forces to disband. What is more interesting and noteworthy is that EAM agreed to demobilize its own forces with hardly any conditions. The only condition worthy of mention is the request for Britain to disarm the "Government support units"; EAM's main opposition. Knowing full well that Britain would never allow communist rule in Greece and also knowing that the Soviet Union signed an agreement with Britain not to interfere in Greece, EAM still believed it could come to power with no outside help.

When the British went ahead with the original plan, ignoring EAM's request to disarm the Government Support Units, EAM withdrew from the government. EAM then protested against British actions by organizing demonstrations and general strikes. When the Athens Square began to flood with thousands of demonstrators, the police were ordered to fire on the crowds, killing fifteen people. To make matters worse, Churchill approved a plan for Britain to occupy Athens by any means necessary if required. ELAS still held more than three-quarters of Greece but because it could no longer count on outside (Soviet) support, it had to re-evaluate its own position.

Under these conditions EAM, in January 1945, accepted an armistice, trading guns for votes. The Varkita agreement was signed on February 12, 1945, requiring all bands to demobilize and surrender their weapons. The British, once again, confirmed their allegiance to the Greek Government by giving Athens full political and military support, committing their willingness to fight to prevent a Partisan victory. The biggest losers of the Varkita agreement were the Macedonians. As soon as EAM signed the agreement, all anti-Macedonian laws were back in force and the Macedonian people lost all that they had gained during the German occupation. EAM/KKE (Greek Communist Party) made absolutely no effort to safeguard Macedonian rights, in the agreements with Britain, and as a result began to lose favour with the Macedonian leadership. When the Macedonian Partisan forces were ordered to demobilize, as part of the Varkita agreement, the Macedonian leadership refused. Goche and Titan refused to disarm and disband without guarantees that no harm would come to their men or to the Macedonian people.

The question of "what will happen to Aegean Macedonia under Greek communist rule", was still unclear. Greece, unfortunately, was determined to rid itself of the Macedonians one way or another and outlawed the Macedonian forces. A strike force was assembled by ELAS (the Greek Partisans) and sent north to intervene and arrest the Macedonian outlaws. Instead of putting up a fight the Macedonian brigades crossed over the Yugoslav border and entered Vardar Macedonia. There they were a welcome addition to existing Macedonian forces fighting the Albanian Balisti (German allies) in Tetovo and

Gostivar. The Macedonian leadership could have stayed and fought ELAS but it would have made no sense to bring the war home to Macedonia. They knew very well that British troops would soon follow and they would be fighting a senseless, bloody war in their own backyard.

With the Macedonian force out of the way, the Greek police were back and up to their old tricks. This time it wasn't only the Macedonians who were their victims. They hated the Greek Partisans just as much. With practically no one to stop them, the Greek police escalated their terror activities arresting, torturing, and murdering people indiscriminately. This included the EAM, ELAS, and KKE (Communist Party of Greece) leadership. By the time elections were convened most of the Partisan leadership had disappeared. They were either in jail serving hard time on fabricated and trumped up charges or they were dead.

Elections were scheduled for March 31st, 1946 but instead of voting, the Greek Partisans re-armed themselves and rebelled against the Greek Government. The rebellion manifested itself as an attack on Greece in the village of "Lithohorion", situated East of Mount Olimp (Olympus) directly south of Katerini in Thessaly. Other attacks soon followed and in no time the conflict escalated into a full scale Civil War, engulfing not only Greece but Macedonia as well.

In a bizarre turn of events, ELAS, who less than a year ago turned their guns on Macedonian fighters, now extended their hands in friendship. All was forgiven and forgotten when the ELAS leadership asked the Macedonians for their help. This time they came with offers of "equal rights", "recognition", and even possibilities of "re-unification with Vardar". Now tell me what Macedonian could resist that?

Many Aegean Partisan fighters, who had crossed over to Vardar Macedonia, only the year before, came back. On their return they organized themselves under NOF, the Macedonian National Liberation Front and fought side by side with ELAS. Many were well aware of the saying "beware of Greeks bearing gifts" and knew that the Greek offer was too good to be true. But there was always that small ray of hope that perhaps this time the outcome for Macedonia might be different. Besides, their families, homes, and lives were in Aegean Macedonia. What other choice did they really have? They returned because they were lonely, loved their families, and because they had to live with the guilt of leaving their loved ones in dire straits. Every Macedonian born in Macedonia, even in the most desolate places, knows the feeling of homesickness and yearns to return.

The new alliance between ELAS and NOF opened many opportunities for the Greek Partisans beyond the Greek borders. While the Greek government controlled the big cities and towns, the Partisan strength was in the villages and mountains. Most of the Partisan recruits came from the peasant population and showed themselves to be idealistic, hopeful, and determined to fight. Camps were set up in mountainous seclusion where new recruits were given combat training. There were also training camps and supply depots set up outside Greece, in Albania and Yugoslavia. One such camp was the town of Bulkes, located in northern Yugoslavia. Bulkes was a beautiful town with neat rows of lovely houses and fertile lands that could feed an army. The Germans had built Bulkes to house German families. After the German armies retreated, some residents of Bulkes were kicked out while others left voluntarily. The empty town was loaned to the Greek Partisans to use as a supply depot for warehousing food, uniforms, and weapons. Bulkes was also a training centre for officers, and an administrative centre for propaganda. During the Partisan days the town of Bulkes was administered in the true spirit of socialism.

By early 1947, the Partisan force was showing real strength in military capability and promise for delivering on its commitments to the Macedonian people. About 87 Macedonian schools were opened in the Lerin and Kostur regions. A record number of students (10,000) were reported attending school. Macedonian literature and culture seemed to flourish. The Greeks, unfortunately, were never at ease with the Macedonian gains and there was visible resentment and mistrust between the two peoples. Greek chauvinism seemed to flourish even at the best of times. Macedonians, on the other hand, were never at ease about revealing their real names or identities, especially to the Greek Partisans. One Macedonian explained it to me this way, "If they knew that you were Macedonian then you had to watch both your front and back, because you never knew where the next bullet was going to come from."

In Macedonia the ranks of the Partisans were swelling mostly with volunteers from the patriotic Macedonian villages. Some, who had combat experience, were promoted to the rank of officer. The Greeks were hesitant and careful not to promote Macedonians to high ranks. Those they reserved for Greeks only. In addition to enlisting men, the Partisans also drafted women as nurses, field medics, tailors, menders, launderers, cooks, supply organizers, and even armed combatants. For a while the Partisans grew their own food in donated and abandoned fields. The workforce, managing the harvests and delivering food to the Partisan camps, was made up mostly of women volunteers.

Britain was not happy with the new developments and squeezed the Greek Government to expand its military capability and to arm itself with heavy arms. "Up to 1947 the British Government appointed and dismissed Greek Prime Ministers with the barest attention to constitutional formalities. British experts dictated economic and financial policy, defence and foreign policy, security and legal policy, trade union and unemployment policy" (page 306, Barbara Jeleovich, History of the Balkans, Twentieth Century). For her interference inside a Sovereign State's affairs and for allowing heavy-handed tactics, Britain received criticism from the United States, whose dollars were used to rebuild Greece.

Both the Greek Government and the Partisans were recruiting fighters from the same population. While young men were drafted to fight for the Greek Government, their wives, sisters, brothers, mothers, and fathers were drafted to fight for the Partisans. There were heavy propaganda campaigns conducted on both sides poisoning the minds of the young and impressionable, dividing and tearing the community apart and pitting brother against brother.

This was the Greek legacy passed on to the Macedonian people for offering their help. This was the "Greek curse" that many Macedonians must bear for partnering with the Greeks. To this day many Macedonians harbour hard feelings and struggle to make amends. To this day the Macedonian community remains divided on this issue.

From the day the British set foot in Greece, they were adamant about ridding themselves of the Partisans by any means possible, even condoning acts of violence and terror. From mid-1945 to May 20th, 1947, the Partisans reported that "in Western Macedonia alone, 13,529 Macedonians were tortured, 3,215 were imprisoned, and 268 were executed without trial. In addition, 1,891 houses were burnt down and 1,553 were looted, and 13,808 Macedonians were resettled by force. During the war, Greek-run prison camps where Macedonians were imprisoned, tortured, and killed included the island of Ikaria near Turkey, the Island of Makronis near Athens, the jail Averov near Athens, the jail at Larisa near the Volos Peninsula, and the jail in Thessaloniki. Aegean Macedonian expatriates claim that there were mass killings on Vicho, Gramos, Kaymakchalan, and at Mala Prespa in Albania" (page 116, John Shea, Macedonia and Greece, The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation).

In 1946 the Greek police attacked a band of musicians from Oshchima and Ternaa at Popli while they were on their way to play at a wedding in Rudari. The musicians were severely beaten and their musical instruments were destroyed. For one young man his trumpet was his only means of support.

In 1946, a Greek policeman shot and killed Sofia Ianovska from Zhelevo for fun. The woman, whose husband was in Canada at the time, was standing on her front porch waiting for her children to arrive from work. The crazed policeman fired at the woman because she was looking in his direction, instantly killing her. According to local accounts, an inquiry was not conducted regarding the shooting, nor was the policeman ever questioned about his actions.

In 1945-46, in retaliation for one of their own being killed, the Prosfigi (people that Greece imported from Asia Minor during the 1920's) of Popli killed Nikola Cholakov, an innocent man from Orovnik. The only connection Nikola had with the dead man was that he was a supporter of the opposite side in the conflict.

I have been told that the Prosfigi in Macedonia committed atrocities against the Macedonian people but were never punished for their crimes. I also want to emphasize that the Macedonian Partisans had the strength and opportunity to round up all the Prosfigi in north-western Macedonia and massacre them to the last one but instead they used sound judgement and left them alone. Macedonians understood that the Prosfigi were also victims of Hellenism.

The Greek Government in Macedonia worked closely with local collaborators and enlisted, from the Macedonian population, only those who could be proven trustworthy. The collaborators worked hard to identify all those who were sympathetic to the Partisans and reported on their activities on a regular basis. Anyone reported aiding the Partisans was severely punished and sometimes executed. In the spring of 1947, all those who were blacklisted were rounded up, arrested, and locked up in the Lerin jails. Those accused of aiding the Partisans, were taken out and executed. The rest, after spending one hundred days in jail without trial, were sent to various concentration camps in the most desolate Greek Islands.

I want to mention something very important here because I believe the Greek Government, even before the Greek civil war, had plans "to deal with the Macedonians in Greece". "In 1947, during the Greek civil war, the legal act L-2 was issued. This meant that all those who left Greece without the consent of the Greek government were stripped of Greek citizenship and banned from returning to the country. The law applied to Greeks and Macedonians, but in its modernized version the act is binding only on Macedonians. It prevents Macedonians, but not former Communist Greeks who fought against the winning side from returning to Greece and reclaiming property. On January 20, 1948, the legal act M was issued. This allowed the Greek government to confiscate the property of those who were stripped of their citizenship. The law was updated in 1985 to exclude Greeks, but still binding on Macedonians" (pages 116-117, John Shea, Macedonia and Greece, The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation).

Clearly acts L-2 and M were designed to work against the interest of the Macedonian people. Even innocent Macedonians who left before the Civil war were not allowed to return. The question now is "What was Greece planning to do with the Macedonians?" The way acts L-2 and M were enforced over the years brings another question to mind. If there were no Macedonians living in Greece, as the Greeks claim, then what nationality were these people the Greek Government refused to allow back? Why is it that Greek law makes the distinction between Macedonians and Greeks when it suits Greece and not when it benefits the Macedonians?

By the end of 1947 battles were raging everywhere and the war was slowly moving north into Macedonia. Clearly this was a "Greek War", yet again the Macedonian population was being sucked into it. The heavily armed Greek air force and mechanized artillery gained control of most cities and main roads. The Partisans were literally trapped and continued their strictly defensive campaigns mainly from the mountains of Vicho and Gramos.

As the situation became critical, both sides stepped up their recruitment campaigns and again were drawing from the same population. The Partisans could no longer count on volunteers alone and began to enlist fighters by force and drafted anyone they could get their hands on, male or female. In addition to support roles, women were now armed and given combat duties. They fought alongside the men against the well-trained, well-disciplined, and heavily armed Greek Army. Such was the fate of the Macedonian women, most of whom were taken by force to fight someone else's war.

As the war intensified, the Greek air force regularly bombed Macedonian villages putting the civilian population, including the children, in danger. To save the children, in the spring of 1948, a temporary evacuation program was introduced and implemented on a voluntary basis. It is estimated that about 28,000 children from the ages of 2 to 14 were rounded up and taken across the border into Yugoslavia. From there they were sent to various Eastern Block countries.

Again, I want to point out that the evacuation program was sponsored and organized by the Greek Partisan Leadership which was fully versed in "Greek Law"(act L-2). Yet they carried out the children's evacuation program and lied to the trusting mothers that the evacuation was only a temporary measure. Almost all the Macedonian children who were evacuated in 1948 are still not allowed entry into Greece.

By the spring of 1949, the Greek Civil War became a "killing field" consuming the Macedonian population. Some of the children who were previously evacuated were brought back to fight against the battle hardened Greek army. Children who were strong enough to carry a rifle, regardless of age, were snatched from the child refugee camps in Romania and brought back to Greece. Two of the three groups that were brought back were instantly massacred upon engaging the Greek Army. They were all under the age of fifteen and had no combat training and no idea of what to expect. The third group was spared only

because mothers protested against such barbaric acts. The Partisans demobilized the third group before it reached the battlefields and sent the children home.

By the twisted hand of fate, Zachariadis, the supreme commander of the Partisan forces and his cronies, in their wisdom, decided to make a final stand against Greece that would make or break the Partisan movement. Their rationale was that the Partisans needed to occupy a large town or city to serve as their base. This would make them worthy of consideration and perhaps gain the attention of the Super Powers, especially the Soviet Union. There are many who share my belief that the Partisan attack on Lerin on February 12, 1949, was nothing more than an attempt to exterminate the Macedonian fighting force and terrorize the rest of the Macedonian population into leaving Greece. I can say that with certainty now because that is exactly what happened.

In one last-ditch attempt to gain composure and legitimacy, the Partisans attacked the city of Lerin, attempting to create a base of operation and show the world that they were a force worthy of recognition. Their effort, however, was not rewarded. They didn't capture Lerin and lost most of the force in the attempt. Seven hundred young Macedonian men and women died on that fateful day, their bodies buried in a mass grave. The Partisan leadership waited until dawn before ordering the attack. Wave after wave of innocent young men and women were slaughtered, cut down in their prime by Greek machine-gun fire. The horror of the slaughter became visible at of dawn when the first light revealed the red stained terrain. The fresh white snow was red with the blood and bodies of the fallen.

To this day opinions are divided on the rationale of attacking Lerin so late in the war. The war was almost over and the Greek Army, supported by Britain, was unstoppable. In retrospect, some believe that gaining control of Lerin would have given the Partisan leadership a bargaining chip for surrender. Looking at the facts, however, reveals a more sinister plan. By now it was well known throughout the world that Britain would not allow a communist influence in Greece. Britain's decision was supported by the Soviet Union and by Stalin himself. The Partisan leadership was well informed that it could no longer depend on support from the Communist Block countries, under Soviet influence. Relations with Yugoslavia had broken off and the Greek-Yugoslav border was closed. The Communist Party, which promised Macedonians human rights and freedoms, slowly began to distance itself from its commitments. Most of the Partisans who fought in the battle for Lerin were new recruits and inexperienced fighters. Most of the force was made up of Macedonian men and women under Greek leadership. The Partisan command hesitated when it was time to launch the offensive, thus giving the enemy extra time to prepare its defenses. The hesitation demoralized the Partisan combatants who were not prepared for the prolonged outdoor winter cold.

A cursory analysis of developments prior to the Lerin assault and a post-mortem of the aftermath led to one inescapable conclusion. The assault on Lerin was designed to destroy the Macedonian Partisan force. By offering the Lerin offensive instead of surrendering, the Partisan leadership "sacrificed its own force". By accident or by design the assault on Lerin contributed to the demise of many Macedonian fighters and to the mass exodus of the Macedonian population. Many believe that the Greek civil war succeeded in "ethnically cleansing" the Macedonian people, where many years of assimilation had failed.

Fearing reprisal from the advancing Greek army, in August 1949, waves of refugees left their homes and went to Albania to save themselves. When the war was over, Greece did not want them back. As a result, they were sent to Eastern Block countries that were willing to take them.

Years later some tried to return but Greece (act L-2) would not allow it. Even innocent Macedonians, who did not participate in the conflict, including the evacuated refugee children, were refused entry (again act L-2). Years passed and still they were refused entry again and again. They were not even allowed to visit ailing relatives. Finally in 1985 a repatriation policy was introduced and amnesty was given but only to those of "Greek origin". This again excluded the Macedonians.

As the Macedonian terrain was rained upon by bombs from the air and from cannon fire, the frightened Macedonian people, mostly made up of old men and women and mothers with young children, took with them whatever they could carry and left their homes for the safety of the mountains. From there they were told to go to Albania and meet up with their relatives.

"One such group left the village of Kolomnati and was headed down the mountain towards Rula when it was spotted by a young Greek officer. The young man immediately telephoned his general and informed him of the situation. 'Should we intercept?' inquired the young officer. 'No, let the troublemakers go, we don't want them here,' replied the old general." (Story told by the general's assistant who asked to remain anonymous).

When the Greek Army broke the Lerin Front the Partisan force that survived the onslaught fled for Albania. The fighters closest to the city were captured and imprisoned. Those who confessed to having voluntarily joined the Partisans were all executed. The others were either exiled in the Greek Islands or released after serving their sentences in local jails.

In its pursuit of the fleeing Partisans, the Greek Army managed to cut off the escape route of a group of Partisans who were manning the cannons and artillery fire at Bigla (the cannons after the war were put on display in the city of Lerin). Being unable to flee to Albania, the Bigla group attempted to cross into Yugoslavia near Prespa Lake. At the Yugoslav border they were stopped by the Yugoslav army, which agreed to allow them passage only if they voluntarily disarmed. Expecting to continue the war from Albania, the Partisans were reluctant to disarm and chose a different escape route. Unfortunately, they attempted their escape during the daytime and were spotted by the Greek Air Force. Many were killed by machinegun fire from above and some drowned attempting to swim across Lake Prespa. Only a small group made it to Albania.

When they arrived in Albania, to cover for their own blunders, the leaders of the Bigla group concocted stories claiming that Tito's forces attacked them and would not allow them entry into Yugoslavia. Later the same men changed their stories and told the truth about what happened. Unfortunately, by then Greek Partisan and Yugoslav relations had deteriorated. Even though Yugoslavia was one of EAM's strongest supporters, the Greek Partisans used this story in their propaganda campaigns to discredit Tito in the eyes of the Soviet Union.

When the Greek Civil War was over, the Partisan leadership assembled in the abandoned Italian camp of Bureli, in Albania, to assess what went wrong and why they lost the war. After some deliberation, they came to the conclusion that it was Tito and the Macedonian collaboration that sabotaged the war effort. The failure was blamed on the Macedonian Partisan leadership for co-operating with Tito's Partisans. Seven of the most loyal Macedonian leaders were accused of sabotage and sentenced to death. Fortunately, Ever Hodzha (Albania's highest State Leader) did not want atrocities committed in his country and would not allow the executions to take place. The men were then taken to the Soviet Union, tried for treason and sentenced to life imprisonment to be served in the prison camps of Siberia. After Stalin's death, Krushchev re-opened the case and found the men innocent of all charges and released them.

After the Greek Civil War was over life in Aegean Macedonia was no longer the same. The smaller villages were evacuated (some permanently) and the people were relocated to the larger towns under the watchful eye of the Greek police. The familiar joy and laughter was gone and the streets were barren of children. The proud Macedonian people, who only a few years before had reveled in life, were once again joyless.

Through the conflict of the Second Great War a new-world order emerged. Two industrial giants, the Soviet Union and the United States, rose above the rest and with their opposing ideologies would dominate the future world.

The Plight of the Macedonian Refugee Children

It was a dreary spring day on March 25th, 1948 when it all began. It was a day filled with high emotions, tears, and heartbreak for the mothers and children of western Aegean Macedonia. It was the day the Detsa Begaltsi (Refugee Children) left, and for most it was the last time that they would ever see their beloved family and home.

The idea of evacuating the children was proposed by a sympathetic group of young men and women at a Youth Conference in 1947 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. The escalating conflict in the Greek Civil War posed a threat to the civilian population, which was a concern for the "progressive youth". Although they couldn't do anything for the civilian adults who were needed to support the war effort, there was a way to help the children. They proposed a temporary evacuation whereby the children would be sent out of the country to pursue their education in safety, with the intent of being returned once the conflict ended. Although it was a good idea, the Greek Communist Party (KKE) saw no immediate need for such a plan and as a result it didn't give it much support. Partisan General Markos Vafiadis, however, saw merit in the proposal because he believed that the conflict would escalate and concentrate in western Aegean Macedonia. He was, at the time, responsible for the defense of parts of western Macedonia that included the territories of the Lerin region and parts of Kostur and Voden regions. In 1947 the Partisans were at their peak strength and, with the exception of the large cities, were in control of all territories in western Aegean Macedonia.

When the Greek Government began to use heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, the idea quickly gained KKE support and the "save the children" program was born. Before the program was put into action it gained approval from the Macedonian Liberation Front, the Women's Antifascist Front, and the Red Cross. The host countries, willing to look after the children, were contacted to gain their approval and information campaigns were begun to inform the people about the program. The district and village organizations were also asked to participate and were eventually given the responsibility of organizing and implementing the actual evacuations.

When the authorities in the Greek Government heard of this program they began the so-called "pedomazoma" (collect the children) campaign. The Greek army, upon capturing Macedonian villages, was ordered to evacuate the children, by force if necessary. After being gathered at various camps, the children were eventually sent to the Greek Island of Leros. There, they were enrolled in schools to study religion and became wards of the Greek Queen, Fredericka.

After the conclusion of the Greek Civil War (1951-52) some children were returned to their homes in Macedonia, while most, especially those whose parents were killed or fled the country as refugees, became wards of the Greek State and remained in dormitories until adulthood. All the children who remained at Leros were completely Hellenized and were never heard from again.

The Leros camps became active again after 1952, this time with children who had returned from the Eastern Block countries. As a result of Red Cross intervention, some children were allowed to return home. Unfortunately, the Greek authorities collected them and sent them to the camps in Leros where they were kept until the fall of 1959, before they were released.

Pressure from the community prompted organizers of the "save the children" program to expedite the evacuation process to stop the "Burandari" (nickname for Greek Government soldiers and policemen) from taking more children.

The evacuations carried out by the Partisans were done strictly on a voluntary basis. It was up to the child's parents or guardians to decide whether the child was to be evacuated or not. No child was ever evacuated by force or without consent. The evacuation zones were selected based on the severity of the conflict and the degree of danger it posed to the children. Central command organizers decided on the selection criteria and qualifications for which children were to be evacuated. The lists included all children between the ages of two and fourteen as well as all orphans, disabled, and special children. Before the evacuation was put into effect, women over the age of eighteen were enlisted from the local population and from the Partisan ranks to be trained to handle young children. Widows of fallen Partisans were also recruited as "surrogate mothers", to accompany and assist the children through the evacuation process and during their stay in the host countries.

The evacuation program began to gain momentum in early March of 1948 starting with the recruitment and training of the special teachers. The actual evacuations were carried out on mass, starting on March 25th through to March 30th, 1948 until all the designated villages were evacuated. Most children were transported through Yugoslavia and were sent to Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Some were evacuated through Albania and Bulgaria. As the numbers of the evacuated rose,

children were also sent to East Germany and to the USSR. It is estimated that about 28,000 children in all were evacuated, most of them from northwestern Aegean Macedonia. Although smaller in number some orphans, children of Partisans, and children of families that were in trouble with the Greek Government authorities were also evacuated.

When their turn came, the children from each village were summoned and escorted by Partisan guides to the closest designated border crossing. For their safety, the children traveled under the cover of darkness and away from the main roads. In some cases, due to heavy aerial attacks and falling bombs, some villages evacuated their children in haste without escorts and they became stranded in the snow-covered mountains without shelter.

Mothers prepared luggage, a change of clothing, food, and eating utensils before escorting their little ones to the designated meeting places. With eyes tearing, mothers said goodbye to their loved ones before sending them into the hands of destiny. Their cries could be heard for a long time as they disappeared into the distance. It didn't take too long before the emptiness was felt and many mothers could not stop crying, contemplating the fate of their little ones.

The children walked in single file, behind their surrogate mothers, holding hands. The older children comforted the young as they moved into seclusion. Under the cover of darkness they silently slipped over the terrain, avoiding roads and open spaces being constantly reminded by their Partisan guides to keep quiet. They crossed over high mountains and steep slopes ever mindful and vigilant of the flying Greek menace above as they made their way to the borders. The lucky ones spent the nights indoors in designated villages. The others, however, slept outdoors in the open spaces of the frigid mountains questioning the wisdom of their elders and wondering which was more dangerous the falling bombs or the freezing cold.

During their trek, one group came across a dangerously steep slope laden with loose rocks leading directly into the rushing waters of a river. Being too dangerous for the children to cross alone each mother had to make several trips carrying children on their shoulders one at a time. Expediency was in order as the slope was exposed to aerial view. One child was lucky that day as a tragedy was narrowly averted. In her haste to get across one mother tripped over a thorn bush, losing her balance. As she stumbled she managed to take the child off her shoulders and toss her up the slope. Luckily, the girl didn't panic and was able to brace herself. The mother then grabbed the child's feet and regained her own balance. It was a frightening experience for everyone in the group.

Another group, frightened by the heavy aerial bombardments, left their village under the cover of darkness at one thirty in the morning. It was cloudy and raining that night, ideal for escaping the bombers but a disaster for the morale of the children. It rained all night and through to the next day as the group hid in the mountains. They couldn't risk lighting a fire and being seen so they stayed wet and cold through the day, enduring nature's punishment. When night came they inched their way through darkness over snow covered; thorn infested terrain to the next village. The children were in shock and hardly felt the bleeding cuts on their feet. Some had no shoes and their mud soaked socks offered no protection against the sharp rocks and stinging thorns.

As one group made their way towards their destination one of the surrogate mothers couldn't stop crying. The person in charge of the group explained that there was no reason for her to be upset since all of the children were accounted for, fed, and looked after. But the mother was still upset and kept crying. When asked what was the problem, she explained that she couldn't properly take care of a six-month-old orphan baby that was left in her care. She only had one spare diaper and after washing it she had no means of drying it. The best she could do was put the diaper against her own chest. It never dried and she felt so sorry for the poor child who had to wear a cold, wet diaper out in the freezing cold.

The borders could only be crossed at night so the children had to wait in seclusion until it was dark. To prepare them for the journey the children had to leave the villages and head for the mountains before dawn. As they left they were told to leave their belongings behind, promised that they would be delivered to them later by wagon. As the children made their way past the border crossing, the wagon never materialized and they were left without food, utensils, blankets or a change of clothing. To this day many believe that the Greek Partisans stole their belongings.

After crossing the Yugoslav border, the children were taken to the village of Dupeni and from there to Ljuboino to wait for more arrivals. In the care of their surrogate mothers, the children were placed in designated homes where they spent up to a week sleeping on straw covered floors, fifteen children to a room. Food was in short supply so each child was only given a slice of cornbread for supper before being put to bed, still hungry. After a few days of hunger some resorted to stealing food from the village homes.

After spending a week in Luboino, the children were transported by military trucks to Bitola where they boarded a train for Brailovo. In Brailovo each group was assigned to a home where they slept together with their surrogate mother in a room lined with hay for bedding. Morale was low and the children constantly cried from the enduring hunger and homesickness. Food was scarce so, to preserve rations, the children were fed one meal every other day. Those who lost their belongings had no bowls or spoons to eat with and resorted to using discarded sardine cans and whatever else they could find. Some found discarded toothpaste tubes and fashioned them into spoons. One surrogate mother found a rusty bucket and after cleaning it, used it as a soup bowl. The warm soup took on a red colour as the rust dissolved and came to the surface. The children were too hungry to waste it so she skimmed the rust off the surface and spooned it into all the children. An old woman seeing this felt so sorry for the bunch that she offered them her portion, preferring to stay hungry rather than having to watch the children starve. At this point most of the older boys were contemplating escape but their concern for the younger ones kept them from doing so. Some were so hungry they scoured the countryside looking for food, eating kernels of grain and corn and even resorting to killing wildlife to satisfy their hunger. After spending a little over a week in Brailovo, the various groups were transported to the nearest train station where each child was pinned with a name and destination tag and prepared for travel to the various host countries. Separating the children was not an easy task as the young clung to the older children and refused to be separated. Siblings clung to each other with all their might, fighting back with tears and cries. It took a lot of convincing and reassurances before they could be separated.

The first groups to leave were the younger children aged five to ten. Most of them were sent to Bela Tsrkva in northern Yugoslavia. These children were the most vulnerable and had to be quickly rescued before they died of starvation. In Bela Tsrkva, after spending some time in quarantine, the children were placed in dormitories with proper facilities and plenty of nutritious food. The rest, after spending a week or so at the train station, were sent to Skopje. Life at the train station was harsh as most children were nearly starving and had no energy to move. Their hunger was so overpowering that the children had no energy to even complain about the tormenting lice. Many spent their time resting in the stable cars nestled in the warmth and comfort of the hay. The cars, left from WW II were used by the Germans to transport horses.

When they arrived in Skopje the children were given milk and food, which seemed like a gift from heaven after starving for so long. Without much delay, the train wagons were again divided and a group was sent to Romania while the rest continued on their way to Bulkes. Considering the episodes from the last separation, this time the authorities decided not to inform the children or the surrogate mothers. As a result, some children were visiting friends in neighbouring cars and ended up going to the wrong destination. Many mothers didn't know what had happened and worried endlessly about the fate of the missing children. When they arrived in Bulkes (Vojvodina) the groups were supplied with food donated by the United Nations and the children were bathed and given new clothes. From there they were taken by wagons to a nearby hospital for physical examinations. Bulkes was a town built by the Germans and occupied by the Greek partisans. It was teeming with activities geared towards supporting the war effort. Food was plentiful and the children spent most of their days living in empty schools and warehouses. Besides the Macedonians, there were also children from Epirus and Thessaly.

As soon as they became comfortable however, the children were again on the move. After spending about a month in Bulkes, they were again loaded onto train cars, given some food, and sent off to various destinations. Unbeknownst to them, they had been separated again and sent to Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia.

When the group destined for Czechoslovakia arrived, the Czech authorities stripped the children naked from their lice infested clothing, cut their hair, and gave them a bath on mass. It was a new

experience for the Macedonian children to be bathed naked in front of so many people. The local buildings and baths once belonged to the German soldiers but, since their expulsion, they became a haven for the refugee children. After spending time in quarantine the children were taken to a new camp and assigned quarters and schoolmasters. Here they joined other refugee children who had arrived earlier via a different route. The children were re-grouped into pre-school ages 4 to 6, public school ages 7 to 12, and technical school ages 13 and over. The surrogate mothers were responsible for looking after the younger groups consisting of about twenty children each. Their duties included waking them up in the morning, helping them dress into their uniforms, supervising their morning exercises, and making sure everyone ate a good breakfast. In the evening they supervised the children playing until they were put to bed. They also had to make sure shoes were polished and uniforms were cleaned and properly hung for the night. Morning started with exercise and a good breakfast. The Czech teachers were professionals, trained in child psychology, who did their best to educate the children properly. In addition to the regular curriculum, the children were expected to learn various languages including Czech, Greek, Macedonian, and Russian.

On occasion, mothers and children were sent on work assignments to the farms to assist with gathering fruits, berries, and mushrooms. With time mothers and children began to adjust to their new life, with the exception of the usual fighting between Greek and Macedonian children, especially the boys. There was friction between the Greek and Macedonian children, with frequent verbal insults sometimes resulting in fistfights. Eventually the Greek children were moved to a new camp, which put an end to the fighting.

When the group destined for Romania arrived, about one thousand five hundred children were offloaded and sent straight to the baths and their flea-ridden clothes were washed in boiling water. After the bath, each child was issued under garments and pajamas and sent to a nearby compound formerly used by the Germans as a hospital during the war. The children stayed there from April until October 1948. Then on October 25th, 1948 many of the children were relocated to Poland. Most Macedonian children wore homemade woolen clothes that shrank during the hot wash. Fortunately, the good people of Romania donated replacement garments and the children were clothed before leaving for Poland. After spending six months in Romania in a quasi-supervised compound without any schooling, the children became wild and undisciplined. With one supervisor for the entire train, the trip to Poland was a joyride. Some children mischievously climbed through the windows of the railcars to the roof of the moving train and stood upright, pretending to fly. When the train approached a tunnel they lay flat on their stomachs clinging hard to the roof of the rail car. As the billowing smoke from the steam engine enveloped them, their faces blackened beyond recognition. When they crossed into Poland the train was taken over by a Polish crew. A supervisor, trained to handle children, was assigned to each car to deal with the rowdiness. For the rest of the trip, the children were well fed and rewarded with chocolates and apples for good behavior. When they arrived in Poland at the city of "Londek Zdrui", the children were placed under Greek supervision, grouped by age, and assigned to various school dormitories. Children, of unknown age, were grouped by size and height. Initially the children refused to cooperate, mistrusting the administrators and fearing separation again. It took Red Cross intervention and much re-assurance to convince them to cooperate. Unlike the compound in Romania, the dorms in Poland were well staffed with one director and two or three assistants per dorm. Each dorm had eight to ten rooms with four children per room. There was no shortage of food, toys or games. The directors were responsible for supervising morning exercises, breakfast, and getting the children to school on time. After school they made sure the children came back safely, were given supper, and put to bed.

About 2,000 refugee children were sent to Hungary and assigned quarters in a military barracks in Budapest. There each child was undressed, sprayed with pesticide, bathed, dressed in new clothing, and given a package of toiletries that included soap and a tube of toothpaste. The children not knowing what the toothpaste was mistook it for food. The aroma of mint reminded them of candy and many wasted the toothpaste, attempting to eat it. Initially, Greek and Macedonian children were mixed together in a single group. But due to fights, the authorities were forced to split the children into smaller groups, segregated by village of origin. After spending three weeks in quarantine the groups were adopted by the Hungarian

community. Each village community, supported by a factory complex, adopted a group. Some found themselves among the richest communities in the region and were privileged to live in quarters made of marble. Nearby there was a small lake teeming with exotic and colourful fish. Unfortunately, the children were all homesick missing their mothers and had little appreciation for luxury. Slowly, however, routine began to take over as the children attended school and became involved in school and community activities. Besides the regular curriculum, the refugee children were expected to learn to read and write in their native language. Even though Greek officials administered the programs and scoffed at the idea, the Macedonian children were given the choice of learning Macedonian if they wished.

I want to mention here that the Macedonian programs were a direct translation (word for word) from the Greek programs. Even though the children were learning in their native Macedonian language, they were learning what the Greeks wanted them to learn. The Macedonian teachers were not allowed to diverge from the established programs. In other words, Hellenization and Greek propaganda continued to influence the Macedonian children even outside the Greek borders.

By 1949 casualties were mounting at home and reports were filtering through to the refugee camps where children received bad news about the fate of their parents and relatives. Morale was so low that the children became isolated, withdrawn, and would not sing, talk, cry or even eat. To boost their morale the surrogate mothers, who wore black to mourn the deaths of their husbands, resorted to wearing white and colourful dresses. For the sake of the children, in spite of their own sorrow, mothers had to appear cheerful and put on happy faces.

As the Civil War in Greece intensified, the Partisans were running out of recruits at home and began to look at the refugee children abroad as a possible source. Although draftees were recruited from all the camps abroad, most of the fighting force came from Romania. Initially, two new groups were formed and brought back for military training. The recruitment campaign and propaganda was so tempting that the youngsters couldn't resist it and were happy to volunteer. Any child strong enough to carry a rifle, regardless of age, was good enough for the draft. The first two groups recruited were instantly massacred upon engaging the battle hardened Greek Army. They were all under the age of fifteen, had no combat experience, and no idea of what to expect. The third group left Romania and went to Rudary, Prespa, via Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Upon arriving, the young soldiers were sent to Shterkovo, another village in Prespa, for about a month of military training and preparation for combat. The young men spent part of March and April 1949 performing military exercises, learning to operate weapons, and set explosives. When word came that the first two groups of young fighters were decimated, there was a loud outcry by the community against such atrocities, "We did not save our children so you can slaughter them." The third group was only spared because many mothers demonstrated and voiced their anger against such a barbaric draft. The group was demobilized before reaching the battlefields and many of the children were sent back to the refugee camps. Some were allowed to go home only to end up as refugees again during the mass exodus in the fall of 1949.

As the Greek Civil War was coming to a close, Western Aegean Macedonia was bombed to dust. Partisans and civilians alike fled to Albania to save themselves. When the war was over many wanted to return but Greece did not want them back. Anyone who voluntarily fled was not allowed to return, regardless of whether they were guilty of any crimes or not. After spending some time in the camps in Albania, the people of Macedonia, again victims of someone else's war, became permanent war refugees and were sent to various Eastern Block countries. Before departure, the refugees were separated into two groups. One, made up mostly of Partisan fighters, was sent to the USSR. The other, consisting mostly of civilians and Partisan support staff, was sent to Poland. After the groups were separated they were transported to the port of Durasi, loaded onto cargo ships, and sent westward through Gibraltar to Poland and eastward via the Black Sea to the Soviet Union. The voyages were long and unpleasant. To avoid detection the refugees were literally hidden inside the cargo and at critical times ordered to remain immobile and quiet for long periods of time. When they landed at their destinations, the refugees were stripped and their flea-infested clothes were burned. After being powdered with pesticide and bathed in hot baths, they were then placed in quarantine where they spent about a month and a half resting idly before being relocated to permanent quarters.

After settling down and securing employment in their new countries, many parents who had refugee children began to look for them and with the help of the authorities were able to bring them home. As a result, many children left their host countries to join their parents in Poland, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, etc.

Refugees who had relatives in Canada, the USA, and Australia through sponsorship made attempts to immigrate themselves and look for their children or have their relatives look for their children if immigration was not possible. Initially "the iron curtain" was shut tight and made it difficult to make inquiries, but as the Red Cross became involved it became easier. In 1953, during a Red Cross convention in Switzerland, the question of the Refugee Children from the Greek Civil War came up and the various Red Cross agencies agreed to cooperate and exchange information with each other. After that, anyone requesting help to locate missing persons in Eastern Block Countries was not refused.

There are instances where Macedonians did experience problems with the Red Cross but these were due to Greek misinformation. When the Red Cross went looking for refugees in the Greek administered refugee camps they were told that the Macedonians were "migrant workers" and not refugees. Here is an actual account of what happened to one Macedonian woman in Poland.

The woman was well liked by her colleagues and in time became a model worker and qualified for a month of paid vacation. When her turn came, she was sent to a luxurious mountain resort. She was alone and felt uncomfortable going places but did agree to go and see the nativity in a local church. There she met two women who suspected that she was not Polish and were curious about how she had gotten there. After some discussion, it turned out the women were Red Cross workers and interested in finding people like her. When the women found out that she was a refugee interested in returning home, and that many others were in a similar situation, they urged her to seek help. She was given an address in Warsaw where she could meet with Red Cross officials and tell them her story. Upon returning from her vacation she and a friend went to Warsaw and after eleven days of appealing and pleading, their story was heard. Officials were curious as to why this hadn't come up at the refugee camps during the official Red Cross visits. As she recalls, unbeknownst to her, the Greek organizers made sure that the Macedonians were sent on day trips on the days of the Red Cross visits. Even after all this, the woman was still not allowed to leave. Greece would not accept her without a request from her husband. Her husband at the time was serving a prison sentence in the Greek concentration camps. It was not until 1954, three years later, that he was able to initiate the process for repatriation. The woman arrived home in May 1958 but could not stand the oppressive atmosphere and soon afterwards she and her family immigrated to Canada.

By 1950, Greece was taking extreme measures to close her borders with Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria. Trusted Albanians from Epirus were brought into Macedonia and seeded throughout the border villages to act as eyes and ears for the Greeks. Greek authorities clamped down on the remaining population and no one was allowed to travel without permission. There were strict rules of conduct put into effect, including curfews. Anyone caught wandering outdoors past dusk was shot on sight. Many shepherds quit their jobs for fear of being killed and left their sheep wandering aimlessly. One little boy had an argument with his stepfather and ran away. The authorities were not at all sympathetic and wouldn't allow the family to go looking for him. The boy's mother and sister went looking for him anyway and brought him home safely at great risk to their own safety.

When the violence in Greece subsided, parents and relatives began to inquire about repatriating their children. Those who displayed some loyalty to the Greek cause were told that their children would be allowed to return if decreed by the Greek Queen Fredericka. Unfortunately, this process required connections with the local Greek authorities and a lot of money, money that most Macedonians did not have. Those considered for repatriation had to meet a number of conditions including the willingness to accept permanent Hellenization. Children from Partisan families were automatically disqualified. Those who weren't willing to change their names or weren't liked for some reason were also disqualified. As the years passed fewer children were allowed to return and requests for repatriation continued to be ignored. Parents and relatives died and still their children were not allowed to return, not even for a visit.

After travel restrictions to countries behind the iron curtain were lifted, parents in spite of the expense, old age and ill health made their way to visit their children. One woman on her deathbed made

her husband promise her that he would visit their daughter in Poland before he died. Feeling his own mortality the man, in poor health, made the long trek and after thirty years of separation saw his daughter for the first time. She will never forget her father's sacrifice.

Another woman who let all four of her children (two sons and two daughters) leave during the dreaded May 1948 evacuation, also made the trek to Poland to see them for the last time. The woman was crippled from a war wound and could hardly walk but knew that soon she would die and wanted to see her children one more time. She traveled by train and in spite of her condition made it to Poland in good spirits. When she arrived, two of her children, a son and a daughter came to greet her. The daughter recognized her mother and after a long and emotional hug asked her if she knew which daughter she was. Her mother would not answer because she didn't know and didn't want to make a mistake. That deeply troubled the adult daughter who began to weep uncontrollably. She did recognize her son and called out his name but would not answer her daughter's pleas. After a while she finally recognized her, wiped her tears and with a wide smile called out her name. It was an emotional but happy ending for that family. Unfortunately for every happy ending there are dozens of sad ones. One old couple did not have enough money or the strength to make the trip to visit their children. Since then both have passed on heartbroken, with their desire to see their children unfulfilled.

Many of the people I interviewed don't know why the Greek authorities wouldn't allow the children to return. In spite of pleas, even on humanitarian grounds, the Greek authorities decade after decade, government after government, maintain the same policy and will not allow the Macedonian refugee children to return home.

After the war was over and all the remaining Partisans were captured or killed, people who were evacuated by the Greek authorities, were slowly allowed to go home to their own villages. While many returned to their old homes, a few families decided to make their home in the new village. Some lost their farm equipment, tools, livestock, and personal belongings to looters. For most, life had to start all over again. As tensions began to ease, those held in concentration camps were released and began to arrive home only to find their property gone. The Greek authorities, in addition to confiscating the properties of many of those who fled as refugees during the mass exodus of 1949, also confiscated the properties of those held in concentration camps. People were demoralized and constantly lived in fear of the authorities and retributions from their collaborators. There was a certain stigma attached to the relatives of Partisans or their supporters that caused them to withdraw from society and keep to themselves. Those who served in the Greek concentration camps were constantly harassed with curfews, restricted mobility, and suspicion of espionage. Many were followed by plainclothes policemen and pressured to become informants and spy on their neighbours. Strangers were viewed with suspicion and automatically assumed to be foreign spies.

As radios became affordable people began to purchase them and listen to various programs, including broadcasts from Eastern Europe and the Federal Republic of Macedonia. The Greek police became vigilant and on many occasions they were observed outside people's yards listening to hear what programs were playing. Those caught listening to foreign programs were accused of espionage. The Macedonian language was once again banned from use and the "M" word became a dirty word even if it was spoken on the radio. Ever since Greece invaded the Macedonian territory, successive Greek Governments refused to acknowledge the existence of the Macedonian language.

One by one, all those who came back from the Eastern European countries left for Canada, the USA, and Australia because they could no longer stand the Greek oppression. They had tasted freedom and wanted more even if it meant abandoning their beloved ancestral homes. They remembered how life was before the latest Greek clampdown and now it was not the same. The people had changed also, they were still courteous and kind but their spirits were broken. Everyone was afraid, careful not to say anything incriminating as if every word was going to be judged and punished. Children born during this time were brought up believing that this was how life was and it was supposedly the best life one could have. They were taught to understand that Greece was the cradle of democracy and no one in the world was freer than the Greeks. Those who knew better did not dare speak otherwise. There were certain things that could not be done or discussed, especially the Greek Civil War. Children were taught Greek

chauvinist songs in school and sang them at home in front of their parents who didn't dare say anything. Even their children could unwittingly betray them. The Macedonian language became "our" language and could only be spoken in secrecy with relatives and trusted friends. The word "Macedonia" or "Macedonian" was banned from the peoples' vocabulary and could not be spoken, especially in public. Pre-school children who learned "our" language at home from their grandmothers spoke Greek with a heavy accent and were constantly teased and scolded for not knowing how to speak properly. If a child was caught speaking "our" language in class or in the yard, punishment ensued which varied from being publicly told not to speak "those filthy words" to being given a good dose of castor oil. Sometimes children sang Greek songs about the deeds of the Greek heroes and broke their parents' hearts. Their precious children were unknowingly idolizing the true criminals and murderers; Macedonia's worst enemies. Some parents, when their children were old enough to keep a secret, taught them that they were a different people, that they were Macedonian and not Greek. Other parents, however, thinking that it was in the best interest of the children not to know their true identity, allowed them to believe that they were Greek. Their loyalties however were never rewarded since it was very rare for a Macedonian child to be accepted in Greek society. It was not because Macedonian children were incapable of being intellectual, as the Greeks would have us believe, but because the Greek Government systemically discriminated against Macedonians. Discrimination was common practice especially at the individual level. Macedonians were constantly put down and as a result kept to themselves. Sometimes, however, during heated discussions or unavoidable arguments Macedonians did show discontentment but the arguments always ended with the lethal insult of being called a "Bulgar", the lowest form of life known to Greeks. The highest level of education a Macedonian child was permitted to achieve was grade six. Junior high was possible only for the children of those who had shown and continued to show loyalty to the Greek cause. One young man whose parents were killed during the Greek Civil War joined the Greek military and afterwards considered the army to be his only family. He was very loyal, studious, and hard working but was constantly denied promotions. During a military exercise he saved a high-ranking officer from drowning and for saving his life the officer promised to help him if he ever needed it. After years of frustration, finally the young soldier went to the officer with his complaint. After some investigation, the officer advised him that his requests for a promotion were turned down because he was not Greek, more specifically because his parents were of Slav origin. This unfair treatment angered the young soldier enough to leave the Greek military, the only family he had ever known. Disheartened he left Greece altogether and joined his aunt in Toronto, Canada where he is currently learning to speak Macedonian. Even though he speaks no other language, he refuses to speak Greek.

After the fall of the dictatorship in Greece, in the mid-sixties, many Macedonians were publicly encouraged by the Greek politicians to leave Greece because "there was no future for them there". Many of the empty villages in western Macedonia were filled with Albanians from west central Greece. Vlachs who originally lived in the highlands of Thessaly and spent summers in the Macedonian mountains took up permanent residence there. Many applied for and were granted the properties of post-Greek Civil War migrant families.

Macedonians who immigrated to Canada, the USA, and Australia at the start of the 20th century organized village associations to assist fellow immigrants in adjusting to their new countries. As post-Greek Civil War immigration accelerated, these village associations became a haven for new immigrants and their membership grew. Encouraged by their newfound freedoms, many of the new émigrés enjoyed their Macedonian culture and language in the diaspora. This was perceived as a threat to Greek influence both at home and abroad. As the associations grew in strength so did their threat to the Greek chokehold. To counter this, with help from the Greek Embassies and Consulates, pro-Greek factions began to infiltrate the Macedonian associations. The weaker associations were overpowered and rendered ineffective. Those that resisted managed to survive and preserve their unique Macedonian identity. For the ones that the Greeks could not subdue, parallel and competing pro-Greek associations were formed. The day a Macedonian association held an event, the pro-Greek association held a similar event, to divide the people. Macedonians wishing to participate in events and prone to blackmail were discouraged from joining the Macedonian organizations and encouraged to join the pro-Greek ones. To this day many

Macedonians will not go to any of the events fearing retribution from both the Greeks if they went to Macedonian events or fearing disappointment and disgust from the Macedonians if they went to a pro-Greek event. This is precisely why the Macedonian community in the diaspora has become a silent community. This suits the Greeks perfectly and leaves the Macedonians frustrated and disappointed.

The most anti-Macedonian organization to surface from all the Greek associations is the Pan Macedonian Association, which aims to not only divide the Macedonian Nation but also destroy everything that is Macedonian. To this day this organization preys on the weak, innocent, naïve, and those who can be bought and continues to spread hatred and lies at every opportunity. The Pan Macedonian Association is a "false organization" fully financed by Greek taxpayers most of whom are unaware of its discriminatory practices and the friction it creates between fellow Greek citizens.

In addition to disseminating anti-Macedonian propaganda and lobbying for "the Greek cause", many of these so-called "Greek-Macedonian" organizations spy on Macedonian organizations and individuals, reporting their activities to the Greek authorities. Many activists and supporters of the Macedonian cause, even though they are Greek citizens, are barred from returning to Greece. Their cause is noble if they serve the Greeks at their own expense, but as soon as one attempts to serve his or her own cause, they suddenly become traitors.

Macedonians are refused entry into Greece at the border points without any explanation. Without consent, their passport is stamped "void" and thrown back at them. They do the same to individuals with foreign passports without respect for the foreign State's property.

After years of living in Australia, one man decided to visit the Republic of Macedonia. Upon entry his passport was stamped with a beautiful red symbol, a real treasure, which made him very proud and happy. His visit to Macedonia was so wonderful that he decided to cross over into Greece and visit the village Nered, where he was born. Unfortunately, the Greek customs officials would not allow him entry. What was most unbelievable is the Greek officer took the man's Australian passport without his consent, and stamped it "void" all over. They literally destroyed the Macedonian symbol by repeatedly stamping "void" over and over until it was no longer visible. No explanation or apology was given.

The Macedonian Refugee Children wish to express their gratitude to the countries and people who opened their doors to them at a time of their greatest need. They treated them not as strangers or immigrants, but as equals. They also wish to express many thanks to the countries and people for giving them the opportunity of free education in their institutions. Only through their generosity away from Greek bias did the Macedonian children prove themselves equal to all the children in the world. Free from Greek oppression they excelled in education and talent becoming professors, doctors, engineers, poets, playwrights, composers, economists, etc.

Most of the refugee children today are living in the diaspora. A great number of them have immigrated to Canada, the USA, Australia, and the Republic of Macedonia. Some remained in their host countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Germany, and Russia) and have made them their homes. They maintain contact with each other through associations and clubs and from time to time meet, attempting to gain entry to visit their homeland. Unfortunately, to this day they have had no success. Greece, after fifty-five years, still does not want them, not even to visit.

History of the Village Oshchima

The village Oshchima is located between the cities of Lerin and Kostour at the Prespa-Lerin intersection near the source of the river Bistritsa in northwestern Aegean Macedonia. The village lies at an elevation of 1020 meters above sea level and is nestled between Mount Bigla on the north, Mount Gonnoush on the east and by Mounts Lokma and Bodantsa on the west. To the north Oshchima borders the villages Zhelevo and Psoderi, to the east, Trsie and Statitsa, to the west, Besfina and Prespa, and to the south Trnaa.

Oshchima's oldest historic accounts have been kept alive in the memories of the elders and passed on from generation to generation.

It has been said that the first inhabitants of Oshchima were Macedonian nomads who drifted there from other parts of Macedonia and settled. It is unknown how old the village is but families can be traced back to the beginning of the 18th century. By the turn of the 19th century there were 36 family groups (approximately 200 people) inhabiting the village. One or two families settled in Dolkoftsi, one in Padinie, one in Kalougerdol, two in Kirkoitcha, and the rest settled in Kashcherishche.

It has been said that when the newcomers arrived the entire region was densely forested. Their shack-like homes were built from wood and straw. In Kashcherishche as the new community grew, a “gathering place” called Sfet-Kashcha (public house) was built which also served as a church. Below Kashcherishche was a small natural spring believed to have healing powers. It was customary for Oshchimians to make small offerings, sometimes pieces of string cut from one’s clothing, in exchange for the spring's gift. In time the spring gained fame and became known as Sfet-coitcha, famous for its “blessed Holy water”.

The original settlers built their homes all over Oshchima and were isolated from each other. Unfortunately, being apart they found themselves defenceless against raiding bandits and were forced to abandon their old houses and build new ones closer together. When the new community began to take shape they named it Gorno Ranchiplochi.

The seclusion and peace for the new community was unfortunately short lived when a gang of bandits discovered and sacked it again. According to legend, the sacking took place on a rainy Easter day. A gang of Gheg (Albanian) bandits savagely attacked the village, burned down the houses and left many dead. The survivors, fearing for their lives, ran into the forested mountains and hid under an overhanging rock. Feeling secure in the forest they enjoyed the comfort of the rocky ledge and spent the rest of the day praying for their safety. Many felt that the experience touched them spiritually and gave them courage to go on. With time the rock became a symbol of strength for the Oshchimian community that commemorated the courage and bravery of the Oshchimian spirit. The area around the rock later became known as Velivden (Easter) in honour of the holy day of Easter. Since then, people who travelled by Velivden felt the rock’s powerful symbolism and paid their respects with a prayer. In times of turmoil, Oshchimians used the rock ledge secretly, unknown to the Turks, as a place of worship to celebrate Easter. The century-old smoke so indelibly impregnated the rock that the blackened marks are still visible today.

The survivors of the Gheg attack eventually re-settled and built their new community deep in the wooded forest. The new settlement, as it grew, became known as Dokimo from the word "dokimia" (catastrophe) which its founders experienced that dreaded Easter day. After the community began to grow, small groups of people migrated deep into the thickest plots of woodland and began to build a new community, which later became the ancestral foundation of the present day village.

Some years later, the same gang of Gheg bandits came back and was astonished to see a thriving community. After looting the village again they carried off as much as they could. On their way they met another group of bandits who were disappointed with their booty pillaged from other villages. Satisfied with their own findings the original bandits directed the new bandits to “go there, there is plenty more” which in Macedonian translates to “odite tamo, oshche ima”. In time, the village of plenty became known as OSHCHIMA from OSHCHE-IMA. The old village that was destroyed became known as Stara (Old) Oshchima. The burial site of the dead from the first raid became known as the Grobishcha (cemetery).

Legend has it that in the year 1465 the old Oshchimian settlers built their first “Pravoslavna” (Old Christian Orthodox) church (tsrkve) in the middle of the Oshchima cemetery. The church was very small approximately 22 square meters (or laka) in size and dedicated to Sveti Jovan. Every year on January 7th the entire community gathered together to celebrate Sveti Jovan and honour the dead from Old Oshchima. For security reasons celebrations took place during the night. In the old days prayer was conducted in the dark to avoid raids and attacks by bandits. Later, after the Ottoman occupation, the practice was continued to avoid being caught and persecuted by the Muslims. After mass the community would split into two groups, so as not to create too big of a crowd and raise suspicion, and go to two separate homes for the feast. No music was played, to avoid attention. Each year two different families took turns hosting the celebrations.

In 1867 the people of Oshchima constructed a bigger, more modern Christian Orthodox church and dedicated it to Sveti Nikola, the patron saint of children and sailors. The church was built near the old cemetery and took nearly ten years to complete. In 1911, with some financial help from Benefit Society Oshchima in Toronto, a new belfry was added. Before Patriarchist or Exarchist influence, Sveti Nikola was a Macedonian Church where service was conducted in the Macedonian language, by Macedonian priests.

On May 20th of each year Oshchima threw a huge celebration to honour its saint. This was a community affair that included outdoor music, dancing, and plenty of food and drink. May 20th was chosen for its good weather, best suited for this outdoor event. In addition to every Oshchimian, relatives and friends from the neighbouring villages such as Besfina, Trnaa, Rula and Zhelevo were also invited to participate in the event. Each family was more than glad to play host to as many visitors as they could accommodate. Everyone was welcome.

Every year on December 6th the village also celebrated the namesake Sveti Nikola. This time, however, visits were made to families with family members named Nikola.

After building the Sveti Nikola Church and as the Oshchimian community became more prosperous, it built a community centre and named it "Aeer" (progress). The community centre was located near the Sveti Nikola Church and served as a gathering place for meetings and other community events. Later it also served as a school for teaching Oshchimian children to read and write in the Macedonian language (until 1913). Eventually, when the Aeer became too small to serve the community needs, a new one was built. As travel became more common, it also served as a lodge for many travellers including roving Gypsies, horse-traders, tin shapers, shoemakers, fish traders, and blacksmiths. Oshchima boasted being the only village in the region to provide free lodging for travellers and their draft animals.

Around the turn of the 20th century, Oshchimians built a second church. The idea came about after several people reported strange and unexplained phenomena in the woods of Osoi. One reported hearing crying voices, another saw floating lights, and another saw a large icon appear and disappear. These phenomena were interpreted, by some, as divine manifestations and the village elders were persuaded to declare the area holy. In 1921, a Christian Orthodox monastery was built on the same spot, in honour of Sveti Ilija. Since then, every year on July 20th the village hosted one of its biggest celebrations, second only to Sveti Nikola on May 20th.

By comparison Sveti Ilija was a modern brightly-lit church with many large windows. Sveti Nikola, on the other hand, had a much darker interior with tall, narrow windows high above the floor. Sveti Nikola was built during the Turkish era with security in mind. The need for strong security was also reflected in the thickness of the steel-hinged hardwood door, designed to guard against forceful entry.

Religion was important to the Oshchimians who regularly observed mass and prayer. Every Sunday and most holidays the community gathered together at Sveti Nikola Church for prayer and to share food and drink. After mass, the parishioners went to the churchyard to receive food and drink from the women who were honouring their dead. It is a Macedonian tradition to offer food and drink to the living, in the name of the departed.

By 1939 the population of Oshchima had grown to approximately 600 residents, consisting of 114 families. An elected committee of village elders and a mayor managed village affairs, social work, and civic duties. Volunteers organized and did most of the community work, each family giving five days of service a year for repairing bridges, water canals, and roads. In addition to dealing with civic matters, the elected committee was also consulted on legal matters. Only after all avenues were exhausted did Oshchimians consult lawyers and the courts. Honour, self-sacrifice, and honesty were encouraged and played a big part in the lives of each Oshchimian. This compensated for the harsh economic conditions brought on by the villages' poor topology and the regional political climate. Residents were compelled to work extra hard in order to survive.

Under Turkish rule, Oshchimians and Macedonians alike had some freedom of choice in choosing their schools, culture, religion, traditions, and language. As long as they did not interfere with the affairs of the Turks and paid their taxes, the Turkish authorities usually looked the other way.

Macedonians didn't like being occupied but after five hundred years it was accepted as another burden to bear in their daily lives.

Life became even harsher after the 1912-1913 Balkan wars. The Greek occupation put an end to all that was Macedonian. Greek policies of forced assimilation erased the Macedonian language and abolished long-standing Macedonian traditions, even in small places like Oshchima. Place names and buildings alike were given Greek names. The Svety Nikola Church, the most cherished Oshchimian possession, was re-named Agios Nikolaos. All the Macedonian writing in the church was erased, including the names of the saint on the icons and the names of the dead on the gravestones. The Macedonian writing on the civic building and stone markers was also erased and replaced with a Greek equivalent. The village was renamed Trigonon which had absolutely no historical significance or meaning for the tradition bound Oshchimians. People's names were also changed and Boris was renamed Vironos, Trpo became Trifunas, Kita became Stavroula, and Slava became Evdoxia. The city of Lerin became Florina, Voden became Edessa, and so on.

Even before the Balkan wars, the Greeks recruited many collaborators and put them to work to spy on the Macedonian community. The Patriarchists and the Greek Church played a key role in recruiting and compensating spies for their services. Karavangelis the Metropolitan (Bishop) of Kostour was a key figure responsible for organizing spy rings, ordering and paying for assassinations, imprisonment, and generally terrorizing the Macedonian communities of Lerin and Kostour regions. It was on Karavangelis's orders that the Greek Andari (bounty hunters) assassinated the Oshchimian priest, Pop Georgi Lalov (Lazarov). The priest's throat was slashed, his beard skinned from his face, and his blessing fingers cut off. Beard and fingers were delivered to Karavangelis as trophies in exchange for gold coins. Another well-known collaborator whose unholy touch was felt by many Oshchimians was Kote from Rula (now a Greek hero). Karavangelis paid him and his band of criminals, in gold, to kill, pillage, and terrorize Macedonian villages.

After the unsuccessful 1903 Ilinden rebellion, the Turks savagely attacked and burned many Macedonian villages. Some Oshchimians, fearing Turkish retribution, fled to Bulgaria, the USA, and Canada not knowing that they would never be able to return. Terrorized by the Turks, life in the village became harsh and depressing. The freedom, happiness, celebrations, culture, and tradition previously enjoyed were all gone. Only memories remained.

Expecting to be liberated in 1912 by their Christian brothers Macedonians found however, that life turned for the worse after Macedonia was occupied in 1913. Migration became even more prevalent after the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 with people flocking overseas to Australia, the USA, and Canada. Soon after the occupation, the people of Oshchima were faced with the harsh realization that Greece was out to destroy and uproot everything that was Macedonian. Nothing was left for Oshchimians at home, no hope for a decent life and no future for their children.

From the outset the Greek Government discriminated against those who openly declared themselves Macedonian as well as those Macedonians that declared themselves Greek and were loyal to the Greek cause. Families of many Macedonian soldiers and volunteer fighters, who died fighting for Greece, were denied pensions on the grounds that they were not Greeks. For example, Elia Spiro Temov from Oshchima was killed in Asia Minor on the Asian front in 1922. His family received no pension because, according to the Greek Government, he was a "Slav-Bulgarophil" (Greeks refused to recognize him as a Macedonian). So anyone who was non-Greek was a Slav or Bulgar. Stavre Sfetko Nanov, also from Oshchima, was killed on the Albanian front in 1941. No pension or other compensation was given to his family either.

In the early days of the occupation, the Greek language was unknown to Oshchimians. Only the young who received schooling in the Greek language understood it. Greek was definitely foreign to the elderly. To force Oshchimians to learn and speak Greek, from 1936 to 1940, the Greek State banned the use of the Macedonian language in public and at home. For many this was a scary experience. Incredibly, even the dogs and oxen had to learn to obey commands in Greek, otherwise there would be a fine of 160 drachmas. This was much more than most Oshchimians could afford. As an extra incentive, part of the fine was awarded to the police officer making the arrest. Greed and vicious hatred for the Macedonian

people turned the Greek police into rabid dogs tracking down old ladies without mercy. People became mute as if wearing an invisible zipper on their mouths. The women could no longer sing songs at work or gossip around the water fountain in Oreshki. Life was made even more difficult by the Greek Government's directive of forced night school. After working long, hard hours in the fields, all adults, including the elderly, had to endure night classes to learn the Greek language. For most, this was indeed a bitter disappointment.

After World War II broke out, Oshchimians, being well acquainted with oppression, found it worrisome to entertain yet another occupation. After a while, however, it became obvious that the new regime was not interested in the day to day activities of ordinary Oshchimians. In fact, the only contact Oshchimians had with German, Italian or Bulgarian troops were in passing by or when being recruited for work details. Only occasionally did German troops use Oshchima for short stays. Oshchimians began to enjoy their freedom and once again spoke the Macedonian language at home and in public without fear of persecution. It was not all without incident however. Daily activities were sometimes interrupted by unforeseen events and are worth mentioning.

It was mid morning on a clear day in April 1941 when many Oshchimians heard the roar of bombers overhead. The day before many had heard the same roar but it was somewhat different this day. The Germans were advancing and the British were trying to slow them down. The previous day about a dozen British bombers had attacked the railroads at Lerin. Perhaps they had been unsuccessful or their mission was incomplete so they came back the next day. But this time it was different, the Germans had acquired anti aircraft fighters and were ready for them. On this occasion Oshchimians witnessed one of these fighters down six bombers. It was a fierce and horrible fight in the skies. One mosquito-sized craft chased and shot down six large bombers trying desperately to flee in all directions. The sky was on fire and people fled in panic to avoid being hit by flying debris. One of the bombers crashed in the middle of a field in Stara Oshchima. The plane broke up on contact and disintegrated into many pieces. The impact left a deep crater in the middle of the field as well as a few unexploded bombs. According to eyewitnesses all of the crew had been killed by machine gun fire before the plane crashed. The village buried the dead near the crash site with proper respect and religious ceremonies. In 1945 the British military reclaimed the crewmen's remains and took them home.

It was an ordinary summer day in 1944 and for some time now people had become accustomed to German patrols making their routine rounds between Zhelevo and Breznitsa inspecting the road and the communications lines. Early each morning four German soldiers set out on foot, two from Zhelevo and two from Breznitsa. When the patrols met about half way, they reversed direction and continued their trek walking back and forth all day. On this particular day, ten Partisans came to Oshchima and decided to attack and capture the patrol from Zhelevo. They set a trap in a ditch near Trnaa and sat in wait. In the meantime, two men from Oshchima, Paso Boglev and Giro Keleshov were at a nearby mill. Paso left his donkey by the road to graze and stepped inside the mill. As the Germans passed by the unattended donkey one of them took it and continued his journey riding. As the two Germans neared the Partisan trap, the only armed Partisan sprang up and fired a rapid volley in the air. Unfortunately, after the initial volley the gun jammed. The Germans quickly hid in the ravine beside the road and began firing back. The Partisans discouraged by their failed attempt, quickly fled into the mountains. Hearing gunfire in the distance, the Germans in Zhelevo quickly rushed to investigate. Also hearing gunfire, Paso and Giro left the mill and went to the road to see what was happening. On their way up they were met by a fast moving German military vehicle rushing towards them. Seeing the rushing vehicle with armed Germans approaching, the two men became startled and fled. Paso ran into the river and hid but Giro ran for the hills and was in full view. The Germans seeing the man flee, immediately gave chase and fired at him. The people in the village hearing the commotion and gunfire feared for their lives and ran. The Germans seeing people running began to fire at anything that moved. An old woman, Soultia Toupourkovska, was shot in the neck and killed by a stray bullet. The brothers Nikola and Vasil Stefovski heard gunfire and came out of the house to investigate. They too were fired upon and fearing for their lives ran barefoot from Oshchima to Statitsa. At one point as they were running by a wall, Nikola felt a sharp, burning pain on his back and

called out that he had been shot. After investigating, Vasil found a piece of shrapnel stuck in Nikola's back. A bullet must have split and ricocheted after hitting the stones in the wall.

In the village meanwhile, the Oshchima priest was summoned and ordered by the Germans to gather everyone at the road near the Zhelevo River Bridge. After everyone was gathered, they were told that if any of the German soldiers were harmed, they would all be shot. A few minutes later the two German soldiers arrived safely and informed the officer in charge that it was the Partisans not the villagers that attacked them. To thank the Germans for not bringing harm to them, Oshchimians gave them lambs, chickens, and eggs.

This was not the only incident that placed Oshchima in peril. There was another incident that almost incinerated the entire region. It was in 1944 and the war was almost over. The Germans were leaving the area when one of their trucks was attacked. It was a single truck with a dozen or so German soldiers and an officer, a captain. The truck was travelling alone near Psoderi when it came upon a Partisan patrol. The Partisans fired, disabled the German vehicle, and killed its occupants, except for the captain. In panic the captain hid among the bleeding bodies of his comrades. After inspecting and verifying that everyone was dead, the Partisans began to loot the dead bodies. When they came upon the captain they saw that he was wearing a gold ring. After failing to remove it by pulling it off, they cut off his finger.

When German command learned of the attack, they were ready to issue orders to burn down every village in the region. Fortunately, the German officer intervened and stopped the order from being issued. During the inquiry he told his superiors that he overheard the conversations of the assailants and came to the conclusion that they were Greek bandits from the south and were not at all associated with the local villages.

In the fall of 1944 when the Germans began to retreat from the Balkans, Oshchimians, fearing reprisals, evacuated the village and left for the mountains. Some set up residence in far places like Stoudena Voda, Filipodolou, and Boukata. The more brave settled around Stara Oshchima and Marna Livada. They built temporary huts of wood and straw for themselves and pens of thorn bushes for their livestock. Seeing that the Germans were not a threat, they returned about a month later. Most villages located near main roads and paths of retreat took more precautions and returned much later. The people of Trnaa, however, decided not to return during the retreat and instead took up residence in Statitsa, remaining there until all the Germans were gone. According to eyewitnesses, when the Germans came back and found Trnaa empty they were so enraged that in anger they stoned two old people to death. In Oshchima the door of each house was stamped with an identification number and the same soldiers came back to these houses time and time again.

In 1945 the Greek civil war broke out and the Communist regime enticed the Macedonian people to join their revolution by promising them freedom and equal rights. Unfortunately, the Greek Communists lost the war and the situation for the ordinary Macedonian became more repressive than before. The Greek army and police were dispatched to beat the Macedonian people back to pre-war status. Many of the fighters were killed while engaging the Greek forces. Those left alive, along with civilian refugees, fled the country to escape death.

It was evening late in the fall of 1946 when a group of Partisans came to Oshchima to the Raikovska barn (kaliva) looking for food. A Partisan guard was placed at Toumba and two local boys, Nikola Stefovski and Simo Raikovski, were asked to watch for Greek patrols. As luck would have it, someone saw the Partisans and tipped off the Greek police (pospasma) stationed at Zhelevo. The boys observed a vehicle approach with the lights off but it was too late to do anything as the patrol was closing in fast. The Partisan guard ordered the vehicle to "stop" and fired a warning shot before he fled. The patrol continued to advance but arrived too late. After hearing the gunshot, the Partisans quickly disappeared under the cover of darkness.

Failing to capture the Partisans, the Greeks became furious and went on a rampage burning the barns, which were full of crops and winter-feed. Oshchimians, fearing for their lives and having no idea how far those crazed men would go, stayed indoors and let the barns burn. The situation went from bad to

worse at noon the next day when an explosion was heard. Not knowing what it was, many fled in panic fearing it was an attack from the Greek army. Fortunately, it wasn't an attack. Buried in one of the barns was leftover ammunition and bombs from World War I which had exploded due to the extreme heat. The barns burned for days and left the people of Oshchima and their livestock hungry that winter. The incident became known as "the burning of the barns".

When the Greek Civil War was coming to a close, the Greek Army advanced north and concentrated their attacks on the Partisan held villages in Western Macedonia. Fearing aerial attacks and reprisals from the Greek army, Partisans and civilians alike fled Oshchima for Albania. When it was all over, Greece did not want them back and as a result many became permanent refugees.

From having 600 residents pre-World War II, Oshchima shrank to 92 people when the Greek Civil War ended. As of March 1970, there were only 8 of the original Oshchimians living in Oshchima. The political climate became so oppressive after the Greek Civil War that most Oshchimians chose to leave their beloved homes rather than put up with the Greeks.

Hatred for the Macedonians continues to this day. Consecutive Greek Governments continue to deny the existence of Macedonians and forbid them to visit their ancestral homes even "to light a candle at the graves of their deceased relatives".

Even though Oshchimians were forcibly uprooted from their birthplace, they will never forget the wondrous sights of Gomnoush, Tumba, and Oreshky. Those Oshchimians who were born, raised, and lived in Oshchima will always have wonderful memories to remind them of their love for Oshchima, family, and community.

Life in the Village Oshchima

Oshchima is a typical Macedonian farming village, which is self-sufficient and through time-tested experience has developed a rich tradition. Life in the village is a general overview that looks at the daily activities of Oshchimians for one yearly cycle. The story takes place in 1939 before World War II and before the catastrophic Greek Civil War.

This chapter takes a journey through a slice of time when Oshchima had a high population and, for the time being, the region was at peace.

Spring is when the year is re-born and daily events in Oshchima center around family, community, and the homestead. Work follows a yearly cycle of activities based on time tested traditions handed down from one generation to another and on the wisdom of common sense. Oshchimians work long and hard for their livelihood, which occupies most of their time. The air in Oshchima is clean and fresh, the water cool and clear, the food healthy and nutritious and for the most part, Oshchimians are a happy people.

As soon as the last spring snow melts, men and women begin the task of clearing out the winter debris from the irrigation ditches (doazhi) and channels (zaseti) to prepare them for watering the fields and meadows. To irrigate properly, each meadow is prepared by digging a level channel at its highest point and cutting an array of inlets, one at every yard or so to let the water seep out and drain evenly. Irrigation ditches, the mediums that transport water from the river to the fields, gardens, and meadows are community owned. Groups of families take turns to clear them once a year. Men with shovels and picks gather together at dawn each morning and work until dusk for many days to clear each ditch from end to end removing gravel, mud, and silt which accumulated over the winter. Damage caused by floods and landslides is repaired using large hollow tree trunks as pipes to bridge gaps in the damaged terrain.

While some Oshchimians are occupied clearing ditches, others are busy digging, fertilizing, and pruning the orchards and vineyards. If the soil is not too wet, the fields and gardens are fertilized with compost from last year's animal manure and table scraps. Manure, cleared from the stables, and table scraps are allowed to compost together for about a year in large compost heaps (bounishcha) before being taken to the fields. Compost is transported by pack animals, usually a donkey, mule or horse. Two false-bottomed bushels are mounted on the animal's back. The bushels are made from tender and pliable

willow shoots warmed on an open flame and twisted into shape. Using a pitchfork, an equal amount of compost is added to each bushel to keep the load balanced. Each bushel can carry about one eighth of a cubic meter of compost. When the destination is reached, by the pull of a latch, the false bottoms fling open, simultaneously unloading their contents.

Spring (prolet) is the time to take a moment and enjoy the outdoors. The sky is crystal clear, the sun is beaming, warming the dark soil in the fields causing a mist to rise, giving the illusion of burning fires. The air is filled with clinking metallic sounds, a sign that the farmers are readying their ploughs (ploug) for the spring tilling. To prepare them for planting, fields are ploughed twice; first with the “ploug” to turn (iscrevi) the soil and then when it’s time to plant, the fields are again ploughed with the “ralo” to part the soil. Two oxen (dzegvar) are joined together using a wooden harness (iarem) to pull the plough. Ploughing begins as soon as the fields are dry from the spring melt.

In March the earth is teeming with tender green growth, the air is filled with the sounds of birds singing happy melodies, not to be outdone by the sounds of jubilant bees and flies. Women scour the fields looking for tender green stinging nettles (kopria), dock (shchave), and sorrel (kiselets) to supplement the family diet. Stinging nettle is excellent for making “zelnik so koprii”. Dock and sorrel are excellent for making stews with fresh lamb and a little rice. Let’s not forget that March is also the month of the Martinka. A martinka is a ring or bracelet made of white and red yarn all twisted together into a string. It’s worn on the first nine days of March to welcome the arrival of spring. They say that should a swallow pick up and fly away with a discarded martinka, its former bearer will receive gifts that will bring them joy.

It will be Easter (Velivden) soon and preparations for the forty-day fast must be made. The cooks will have to plan fat free meals and avoid cooking with lard, butter, and oil. Eggs and cheese must also be avoided. It will be a lean time with meals of bread, beans, potatoes, boiled dried peppers, pickled peppers, pickled tomatoes, and other foods that children tend not to like. For those working out in the fields, meals will consist of a mixture of salt and ground red pepper (sol i piper) and some bread to go with their boiled beans. The more fortunate ones may get one or two boiled potatoes and a pickled pepper (tourshia piperka).

Easter is a very important holiday for Eastern Christians (Pravoslavi) and is lavishly celebrated with roast lamb, Easter eggs, zelnik, sweets, breads, and much more. Those who fast will go to church for morning mass to receive Holy Communion (pricheska). Afterwards they will go home to a long anticipated rich meal.

Easter would be similar to other holidays if not for the colourful Easter eggs. Colouring eggs (vapsani iaitsa) is an old Macedonian custom, practiced for generations. In the old days the most common colouring dye was onion skin, which gave the eggs a beautiful earthy brown, yellowish colour. Later, as dyes became common the Easter egg took on a myriad of colours from dark red to green, blue, and yellow. The most desired colours are red and yellow; often used for the symbols of Macedonia.

Following tradition, the first Easter egg is dyed on the Wednesday before Easter and is buried in the vineyard to bring luck and bountiful grapes. The rest of the eggs are subsequently dyed and hidden from view until Easter day. After lunch on Easter day the lady of the house will unveil her beautiful basket of eggs and ask each member of her family, usually from youngest to oldest, to pick one. When everyone has an egg the tapping begins. One person will hold their egg pointed end up while the other person taps it with the pointed end of their egg, until one cracks. Members of the family take turns tapping eggs until all but one egg is cracked. They then turn their eggs so that the blunt end is exposed and do the same until all but one egg is cracked. The two remaining unbroken eggs are then tapped together. The egg with the unbroken blunt end is held steady while the person with the unbroken sharp point taps the blunt end of the other egg, until one cracks. The owner of the unbroken egg is declared the lucky winner. According to tradition, a strong egg is symbolic of good health, happiness, and prosperity. The cracked eggs are then peeled and eaten while the proud owner of the unbroken egg goes on to compete against the winners in other families.

Another traditional Macedonian holiday is Giurgevden. Giurgevden falls on April 23rd and is considered to be the halfway point between winter and summer or the milestone between the changing of

seasons. On this day sheep, goats, oxen, and pigs are gathered together in communal herds and sent to summer pasture. In keeping with tradition, early in the morning, livestock owned by individual families are brought together to form the communal herds. Traditionally, Oshchima puts together three herds of sheep and one of cattle. Goats, due to their small numbers, usually accompany the sheep herds.

Giurgevden is the first day on the job for the herders. Shepherding (ofcharlak) is a full time job, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week with an occasional short break for family visits and a haircut. Cattle herding on the other hand, is only a day job as the cattle come home to sleep. If the job of cattle herding is too expensive or candidates are not available for hire, families themselves must undertake herding duties. Each family owning cattle must provide rotating services based on the number of cattle owned.

According to Macedonian tradition, a year is divided into two cycles, the fall-winter and the spring-summer cycle. The spring-summer cycle, as I mentioned earlier, begins on April 23rd. Giourgievden. It is worth mentioning that the dates used in this document are those of the new calendar. Prior to 1912 Oshchimians went by the old calendar which is 13 days behind. To calculate the old date, just add 13 to the current date.

Ploughing (oranie) continues well into May. After the summer fields are ploughed, if there is time, farmers plough the fall fields. To allow the soil to regenerate half of the fields are left to lie fallow for at least a year. Before planting, fields are ploughed (meshai) for a second time to further break up the soil. Potatoes (krtouli) are the first crops to be planted, usually at the end of April, followed by beans (gra) and corn (miser) in May. Before planting, a different plough (ralo) is used to arrange the soil into long, straight troughs. Each seed is planted evenly, by hand, into the trough and covered with soil. Care must be taken to keep the crows (galitsi) off the field so they don't eat the seeds. A couple of weeks later, the fields are visited again, this time to dig out weeds (prashenie), to replant seeds that didn't germinate, and to remove excess seedlings. A week or two later, when the plants have grown hardier and formed healthy roots, the fields are prepared for the summer season. Soil is raised onto the plant stems (plnatie) covering their roots, and at the same time creating troughs (trapoi) between rows of plants. The troughs are open on one end to allow water to enter and closed on the other to hold the water from flowing out. The fields are now ready for watering.

The gardens undergo the same process as the fields except the soil may be broken down even further to accommodate the diversity and variety of plants grown. In their gardens, Oshchimians grow peppers (piperki), tomatoes (domati), leeks (pras), onions (kromit), green beans (pachi od gra), cabbage (zelki), squash (tikvi), cucumbers (krastaitsi), zucchini (tikvina), garlic (louk), and lettuce (maroulki), as well as spices including mint (nagiasmo) and parsley (magdanos). Basil (bosilok) is also grown but not for consumption. Most of the plants grown in the gardens including peppers, tomatoes, leeks, onions, and garlic are transplants from plants grown in pans or special partitions (vragii) within the garden. The soil in the partition is mixed well and cleared of stones and other large objects, sometimes using a sieve. Seeds are planted about a month earlier and the patch is covered with straw to protect the plants from frost. To feed the seedlings a mixture of composted chicken droppings and water is prepared and used regularly. Transplantation takes place after the threat of frost has diminished.

Watering begins in the spring, starting with the meadows (livage). Water is channeled from the Oshchima River (Oshchimska reka) via the long spanning upper irrigation ditch (gorna doazha) or the lower irrigation ditch (iazto) to the various fields. Water is also channeled from the Zhelevo River (Zhelevska reka) to fields in the lower part of the village. The gardens (gradinie) require watering next. Due to the variety of plants grown, gardens require more frequent watering, sometimes twice a day if the weather is hot and dry. The crop-growing fields (olnishcha) are watered next. At this time water is in such demand that there is fierce competition for it, sometimes with consequences. That is why Oshchimians employ the services of a water manager (vodar) with powers to sue violators, entrusting him or her with the responsibility of fairly managing the community's water needs. The flow of cool, clean, life-sustaining water makes the meadows green and the fields and gardens robust, giving distinction and character to the landscape. From atop the rugged mountains one can marvel at the patchwork shades of green, a testament to the struggle of the Oshchimian to make a living.

Spring is also the season of flowers, nature's aroma factory. Even before the leaves are out cherry trees are in blossom. Cherry trees produce dense clusters of white blossoms giving off a pleasant aroma. The warm, moist, spring climate also gives birth to an array of wild flowers that spring up everywhere.

By May most meadows (livage) are teeming with green grass and flowers. One particular plant that grows in the meadows has a white flower (charchichok), which resembles the trillium except that it has a fine red outer rim and a bright yellow center. This plant grows in abundance in the meadows of Tourska Polena. When many plants in close proximity blossom, it transcends the imagination in beauty only to be outdone by its heavenly aroma.

Most plants are in full bloom by May, intoxicating the air with nature's perfume. For a short time during May the Oshchimian landscape is transformed into heaven on earth. One particular blue wildflower (sino tsveke), found in shaded areas all over Oshchima, has such an aroma that it makes one feel privileged to have experienced it.

May is also a month for celebrations. May 20th is around the corner and the whole village is getting ready to celebrate Sveti Nikola. This is a village affair when relatives and friends from neighbouring villages such as Besfina, Trnava, Rula, and Zhelevo are invited to partake in village activities. The entire village bustles with energy as Oshchimian families play host to many visitors. To honour Sveti Nikola, between 1865 and 1870 the Oshchimian community built the St. Nikola Christian Orthodox Church. Since then May 20th has been a village holiday. St. Nikola is traditionally celebrated on December 6th in Macedonia, but due to the day falling in winter when outdoor activities are limited, Oshchimians chose May 20th, for its seasonal splendour. St. Nikola is also celebrated on December 6th, but is limited to visiting people named Nikola in their homes.

Beyond grass and flowers, meadows are also providers of tender green delicacies. Women pick young, tender dock, sorrel, and dandelion (mlechki) leaves to supplement meals with nutritious greens. Boys and girls like to pick delicious, tart sorrel stems (lastari od kiselets) to snack on.

Spring delicacies made with tender greens include zelnik stuffed with loboda (cabbage like yellow, circular leaves), zelnik stuffed with tender stinging nettles (koprii), and zelnik stuffed with tender dock and sorrel leaves (shchhave and kiselets).

Oshchimians love to eat fruits in season such as cornel cherries (drenki), berries (kalinki), blueberries (trlinki), wild pears (gornitsi), wild plums (slivi), sweet berries (sladouchki), thorn berries (shipinki), wild strawberries (planouchki), wild cherries (chereshi), and crab apples (diviachki). They also find hazelnuts (leshnitsi) and the hearts of thorn roots (reshetki) delicious.

By late spring swallows (lastoichki) are back from their winter migration, chirping and gathering mud to build their nests. Swallows are fun to watch as they soar high then swoop down to take a drink of water at a mud puddle or to pick up a mouthful of mud for their nest. Children love to watch them building their nests while being entertained by their melodies and flying antics. But they had better watch out for the cats. Speaking of migrating birds, who can forget the cuckoo? One cannot resist the wake-up call of the mysterious cuckoo from Osoi.

In mid-June Oshchimian men prepare their scythes (kosi) for the traditional cutting of the grass. The scythe consists of a round wooden pole about five feet long. The bottom end is two inches wide and narrows to an inch wide point at the top. Midway down the pole is a wooden or ox-horn handle sticking out perpendicular to the pole. The cutting part of the scythe is a sword-like blade about two feet long that mounts perpendicular to the bottom of the pole, held together by a cylindrical metal sleeve and a wooden wedge.

The scythe blade is sharpened by tapping (clepanie) its metal edge thin over a tiny portable anvil (koalna) with a small hammer (chekan, klepach). The bottom of the scythe is soaked in water before use, allowing the wood to expand and tighten the connection. The blade is further sharpened with a long thin sharpening stone. The green grass in the meadows is mature and ready for harvest. Lean men swing their scythes from side to side leaving the grass bunched in rows of sheaves (kosei). Better watch out for the snakes. Once in a while the scythe comes in contact with a snake or a frog, by accident of course. In the old days the meadows were teeming with storks which followed the scythe looking for creatures on the

move. Nowadays it's the crows and magpies that do the scavenging, as the storks no longer come to Oshchima.

After the grass is cut women and children use hand-like pitchforks (*drvena vila*) to spread the sheaves to allow the grass to dry in the hot sun. After the top surface is dried, the grass is turned over and again spread for further drying. When it is fully dried the grass (*seno*) is collected with a wooden rake (*griblo*) and heaped into manageable piles. Each pile is tied in two places with strands of straw (*iazhichki*) into a cylindrical bundle (*sfalnitsa*). Two or three bundles at a time are transported to the barn by pack animals, usually a horse, mule or donkey. Dried grass is fed to the sheep and other animals in the winter. The straw strands used to tie the grass are made of rye or wheat stems, well soaked in water to make them soft so they can be twisted into inch thick rope-like strands.

During long jobs the workers usually take time off to rest in the shadows under large trees away from the searing sun. Lying peacefully on their backs, children also take a rest but instead of sleeping, they watch the clouds above. Their imagination takes them soaring like eagles in the sky, making imaginary castles and legendary creatures in their minds. How wonderful would it be to live in the clouds?

By the end of June school is almost out and cherries are ready for picking. Late June is a favourite time for children and adults alike. Most cherry trees in Oshchima are of the wild variety and are not harvested except for snacking. No Oshchimian could resist the urge to pick a few cherries on the go, especially if the cherry tree did not belong to them. Oreski and Blatoto were but two favourite places to pass by during cherry season.

The end of June is also the time for sheep shearing. Wool is an important commodity for Oshchimians not only because it can be sold for cash but also for making yarn. Traditionally, Oshchimian women make all fabrics by hand including family clothing and bedding materials.

School is over and the children join their working elders with chores. Some children take over the daily task of re-filling the pottery jugs (*stomnina*) with drinking water from Oreshki and other springs. Others deliver freshly made food and cool spring water to the workers in the fields. Temporary duties taken on by others are herding sheep and cows to relieve the herders for a day or two so that they can tend to their own domestic activities. Free time from the farm is often spent making house repairs, cutting beanpoles, gathering wood for fuel, cooking, baking, etc. Once a week, the women of the house bake bread and wash clothes. The rest of the time they process milk daily, cook three meals a day, mend clothing, feed the chickens and pigs, pick the ripe vegetables from the gardens, and generally look after the well being of everyone in the family. You can imagine the joy a son's marriage would bring to his mother when another pair of hands joins the family. Traditionally, bread is made with rye flour but is sometimes combined with wheat or corn flour depending on availability. Grain is stone ground into flour at one of the local water mills a few times a year or as required to keep the flour fresh.

Oshchimians harvest cow, sheep, and goat's milk (*mleko*) for consumption, to make buttermilk (*bientsa*), butter (*mas*), cottage cheese (*ourda*), feta cheese (*sirenje*), firm cheeses (*kasher*), etc. The richest and most abundant milk is from sheep. Ewes give birth to lambs during the winter months and by the end of April lambs are weaned and separated from their mothers. Milking begins immediately after weaning, usually on April 23rd, Gurgevden, and continues until the fall.

Rain or shine, milk is extracted twice a day, once early in the morning and again in late afternoon. Milking is at minimum a three-person job, two to milk (*mlzachi*) and one to guide (*terach*) the ewes to the opening of the corral (*kotar* or *strunga*). In communal herds, each owner is responsible for milking his or her own sheep. A unique mark carved on the sheep's ear identifies the owner of each individual ewe (*oftsa*). Sheep graze in mountain pastures and are milked at designated corrals built close to the grazing grounds. At milking time, sheep are herded into the *strunga* and one by one are forced through a narrow door at the front of the pen and milked as they exit. Before milking can begin, the rams are ejected from the pen to keep them from causing trouble. The pen's fence is usually made of thorny shrubs piled a meter high forming a circular or oval enclosure large enough to fit the entire flock. The entrance door into the pen is usually at the back of the enclosure and made from a large tree branch piled high with thorny

shrubs. The milking door is a small opening at the front of the pen, usually about sixteen inches wide by thirty-six inches high, about the right size for a single sheep to squeeze through. On each side of the milking door, there are stone stools for the milking team to sit on. The milking team sits side by side, knees touching, effectively closing the door opening. Each member of the milking team has a galvanized container in front of them secured to the ground by the insides of their feet. In the old days they used ceramic jugs.

The milking process begins by first guiding a sheep to the milking door. Then when one of the milking team members is ready to take on a ewe, both milkers move their knees inward creating a gap for the ewe to go by. As the ewe attempts to exit it is caught by its hind leg and moved into position in front of the milking container. The ewe is then held by its udder with one hand and milked with the other.

Thumb and index finger are lubricated with milk to make them slippery so as not to hurt the sheep, then milk is squeezed out. The actual extraction involves placing the top of the teat tube between the thumb and index finger, lightly pinching the tube to hold the milk from escaping back up then sliding fingers down squeezing a stream of milk into the container. The extraction is repeated until all the milk is drained from both teats. Each stroke produces about a spoonful of milk.

The milk is particularly aromatic and tasty when sheep graze on healthy green thyme (chembritsa) which grows in abundance in Oshchima. Sheep's milk is one of the most essential raw materials for the manufacture of dairy products. In season, it is collected twice a day and transported home in galvanized containers on the back of a donkey. In the old days, milk was transported in sheepskins. Most of the milk produced is sold to cheese factories (bachila) to make feta and hard cheeses while some is kept for home consumption. Milk (mleko) is a versatile food that can be eaten raw or boiled, made into feta cheese (sirenie), cottage cheese (ourda), butter (mas), buttermilk (bientsa), and whey (siratka), a by-product from making feta cheese. Feta cheese is produced according to age-old recipes and pickled in salt brine for preservation. Nowadays feta cheese is sealed in tin cans until used. In the old days it was stored in oak casks and required regular maintenance (tochenie) to keep it from spoiling. Milk products, other than feta cheese, are seasonal and eaten before spoiling. There is nothing that quenches thirst like buttermilk (bientsa) on a hot summer day or the taste of warm zelnik made with cottage cheese (ourda). Butter is also enjoyed immensely. This is no ordinary butter with its creamy white colour, smooth texture and heavenly taste. Butter is difficult to make but is delicious to eat spread on a warm slice of freshly baked bread. Children love to eat it fresh, especially as an incentive to deliver cool, thirst-quenching buttermilk to the shepherds and the workers in the fields.

Sheep rest in the shade during the hot day and graze in the early morning, late afternoon and night. Late at night sheep are brought to sleep on fallow fields where they leave their droppings, fertilizing the soil. Shepherds, sometimes with young assistants, stay with the sheep twenty-four hours a day. It is during these times that stories are created and transformed into legends often told and re-told. Some stories are of nymphs (samobily) who only come out at night in the moonlight and sit on the rocks near the river's rushing water, washing and combing their long golden hair undisturbed. Others are of eerie noises and screams in the night or of shepherds and sheep dogs chasing wolves with red glowing eyes.

When times get lonely shepherds always turn to the flute. One cannot be a true shepherd without knowing how to play the flute. Shepherds practice and practice until melodies flow from their flutes like crystalline waters from a cool spring. The melodies of a shepherd's flute in the darkness of night are always welcome, not only to the shepherd but also to those who work and travel at night. The shepherd's flute is also a warning to beware of vicious sheep dogs.

In the herding profession, shepherds top the scale when it comes to job prestige, followed by cattle herders then pig herders. Equipped with their staff (krluk), flute (kaval), food sack (torba), and their sheep dogs, shepherds lead their flocks through the mountainous pastures of Oshchima, sometimes for months at a time without a break. It's a lonely life but never without excitement. The days may be boring but the nights certainly are not. On a clear night when there is a full moon, the landscape transforms from the familiar colourful sights of day to that of many eerie shades of black, gray, and silver. The shepherd sleeps outdoors in the wild with the earth as his pillow and the starlit sky as his blanket. When darkness

covers the terrain the shepherd's senses become heightened. He uses his ears to detect danger. To the eyes ordinary shadows become dark and impenetrable objects but to a trained ear the snap of a twig, the rustle of leaves or the bark of a dog may mean that there is a beast lurking nearby. But when the sky is dark and it is pouring rain it's a different matter altogether. Sharp flashes of lightning can blind, while the sound of rain and thunder can deafen an ordinary person with all senses lost, at the mercy of the elements. Shepherds, however, are not ordinary and instead of being scared out of their wits, they use the elements to their advantage. A flash of lightning in pitch dark is welcomed because it provides light to see the flock even if it is only for an instant. With each flash the shepherd can guide his flock to safety. The rain will help grass grow and feed the sheep. Such is the life of the Oshchimian shepherd.

Less glamorous yet equally important is the cattle herder's job. Each morning before dawn the cattle herder (voloar) walks up and down the village streets calling on all to bring their cattle out. As each family escorts their livestock, the voloar takes inventory and holds the herd until every cow is accounted for. The voloar then leads the herd to pasture, making sure none stray. The herd consists mainly of plough oxen and a few cows. The only excitement the voloar may encounter is if the herd is spooked by a wild animal or stung by a particular wasp. The cattle fear the sting of the wasp and the instant they hear its distinctive buzz they raise tails and bolt in every direction. The wise cows will head for home and the safety of the stable. Those not so wise may stray into someone's garden or field and decide to snack while escaping the flying menace. When cows bolt, the voloar has a big job on his hands and may ask others to help him with the roundup. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, at dusk the same day, the voloar escorts the herd back to the village and to their owners.

In comparison, pig herding is easiest but has a stigma of being associated with pigs. It's not a high paying job but for those who need employment, it's a job. Like the voloar, each morning the pig herder (bishkar) calls on the community to bring him their pigs. Then he leads them along the creek, Golem Trap, where they can graze on the long grass, eat roots, and wallow in the cool, moist mud. At the end of the day the bishkar leads the pigs back home making sure each is received by its owner. A loose pig can spell disaster for someone's garden or crops.

In July watering is at its peak. The hot summer sun dries the soil quickly and the fields require watering more frequently. Around this time watering becomes a daily chore. Every drop is needed to water gardens and fields, leaving the meadows as a last priority. To relieve the burden of watering and replenish the dwindling water supply, rain is welcomed and year after year it fulfils its obligation. Sometimes, however, nature forgets its role and must be reminded of its obligations. This is when Oshchimians turn to old traditions. "Vai Doudoulki" is an old custom invoked during droughts but is no longer practiced. It is a plea for nature to provide satisfying rain from the heavens. It involves a young woman being dressed in a costume made of leaves. Water from a stomne (earthenware jug) is poured on her head as the crowd chants the rain song. Dressed in leaves from head to toe, the young woman extends her arms outwards and receives the precious water as the crowd surrounding her chant, "Vai doudoulki sitna rosa zarosi od boga do golema rosa ihi aha".

Many villages in Macedonia practiced this custom with some variations. Some regions used young orphan boys and dressed them in leaves of specific plants. Oshchimians used the leaves and stems of the "biliachka" plant, a common weed growing in abundance in Oshchima.

In mid-July, water worries are set aside for a moment, to prepare for the July 20th St. Ilia celebration. This is a community affair involving the entire village. In 1922 Oshchima built a Christian Orthodox Monastery at Osoi in honour of Svety Ilia. Every year on July 20th organizers put on a big celebration and call on every Oshchimian to cross the Oshchima River to the Svety Ilia Monastery to partake in the many events starting with the church service. Later there is live music and the people sing traditional Macedonian songs. The church committee puts on an impressive display of free food and drinks for all. The celebration is a happy event bringing families, friends, neighbours, and the entire community together.

With the Svety Ilia celebrations set aside and the hot, dry summer weather looming ahead, Oshchimians start to plan for the grain harvest. Rye (hrsh), wheat (pchenitsa), and barley (iachmen) are the most common crops grown. Rye flour is the main ingredient for making bread and is usually mixed

with wheat or corn (miser) to add flavour, freshness, and texture. Chunks of boiled potatoes are sometimes added to keep the bread moist or to compensate for flour shortages. Barley is strictly animal feed.

In early August the sickles are sharpened and made ready for the grain harvest. If the grain is mature and the weather conditions are right, harvesting can begin. To prevent the husks from bursting, cutting of the grain stem must take place early in the morning when the plants are moist with dew. A dry husk will burst and spill its seeds on the ground.

Harvesting is performed by grabbing a bunch of stems near their tops with one hand, while cutting their base with a sickle in the other. The cuts are made close to the soil to take as much of the stems as possible. Any husks that may break off are picked up, usually by young children, and placed in a sack. This way the child can be occupied and productive while adults concentrate on their own work. These are exciting times for the young, being with their parents and at the same time, helping them out. Some children enjoy getting up very early in the morning just to witness the sunrise. Even the trip to the field is exciting. Experiencing the cool morning air, witnessing the dance of the nighthawks (patlashi), and watching darkness fade away into daybreak can be fascinating.

After they are cut, grain stalks are grouped together in bunches about eight inches in diameter. They are then woven together into twenty-five to thirty inch cylindrical bundles (sfnitsi) so that the husks are hidden inside the straw. The bundles are tied with two straw ropes made from grain stalks each about two inches thick. The straw stalks kept moist and supple, are then twisted together to make a straw rope. Once the straw is loosely tied by hand, the straw rope is then twisted into a knot with a wooden stake (vitel) to tighten it. A well-bundled sfnitsa has no hulls exposed or the grain will be lost during transport. The bundles are transported from field (niva) to threshing yard via pack animals (horse, mule, or donkey) two or three bundles at a time. Once harvested, the field will remain fallow until next fall to regenerate.

In preparation for threshing, every speck of fresh cow dung is collected and stockpiled. Those families who don't own cattle, or need more than they can collect from their own, roam the streets picking up the stuff. Dung must be kept cool and moist at all times to keep it pliable. Threshing yards (goumna) are prepared by removing all dirt and grass at the root level without disturbing the hardness of the soil floor.

Most families in Oshchima have a threshing yard located outdoors near the barn. To prepare for threshing, the yard is first moistened with water then coated with dung slush. To ensure the threshing floor is flat, all dips are filled by multiple applications of dung slush. After the area is left to dry it becomes like a thin carpet, strong yet flexible so that the grain will not be crushed when stepped on. At the center of the threshing yard is a wooden post (stedjer) to which the animals doing the threshing will be tied. Horses, mules, donkeys or oxen, sometimes in pairs, are employed to do the threshing. Single hooved animals are preferred because they can be outfitted with special metal shoes that can crush the straw while threshing out the grain.

Threshing begins when the threshing master announces, "Today is a good day to prepare for threshing." The threshing master achieves the honour of being called a master only if he or she can accurately predict the weather. Only after examining the early morning skies and taking a good look at Bodantsa and Belavoda can the threshing master make predictions. Even the slightest shimmer of fog atop Bodantsa or Belavoda can be a warning that it may rain in the afternoon. No fog usually means no rain and threshing can be scheduled for the day. Dry weather is desirable because moisture or prolonged rain can spell disaster for the harvest.

The actual process of threshing begins by laying the grain stems on the threshing floor in two to four inch layers outwards from the center post, in a circular fashion. The stems are left in the sun for a while to dry any dew that may have collected during the night. Next, the threshing animals are brought to the outer rim of the circle and tied with a taut rope to the center post. The animals are then led in a circle around the outer rim, coming closer to the center as the winding rope shortens. When the animals reach the center post, they are turned around thus reversing their direction and unwinding the rope to its limit.

These actions are repeated until the threshing-master is satisfied that the grain is removed from the stems and the straw is well crushed.

With the completion of each threshing cycle the crew gets a chance to wipe off their sweat, take a drink of fresh buttermilk to cool down, and eat some fruit for energy. Watermelon and other fruits are plentiful but nothing beats the taste of a petrovka (early ripening apple with an irresistible aroma).

After a threshing cycle is completed, the straw is separated from the grain by raising bunches of straw off the floor with a wooden pitchfork and shaking them well to release the grain while keeping the straw on the fork. Pitchfork by pitchfork the straw is removed from the threshing floor and taken to the barn. After all the straw has been removed, the grain is swept up and placed in a pile at one edge of the threshing floor. The floor is then prepared for the next threshing. Threshing can be a fun activity for children because this is the only time they are allowed to play in the barn. Jumping on the piles of straw causes it to be compressed leaving space for more.

When threshing is finished for the day, the grain undergoes winnowing (veenie) with a large sieve (resheto) to remove small bits of straw and other impurities. In the afternoon as the air cools and a breeze begins to blow, the grain (zhito) undergoes more winnowing, this time with mother nature's assistance. Using a flat wooden shovel (lopata za veenie) grain with chaff (pleva) is tossed high into the air allowing the breeze to blow away the lighter chaff as the heavier grain falls back onto the pile. This process is repeated until all the chaff is removed.

Long and healthy grain stems are threshed manually to preserve them for making straw rope. Manual threshing is done by taking a pile of stems, about eight inches in diameter, the root end under the right armpit, then while holding the pile intact with both hands, the clusters are violently beaten against a wooden object, usually a stool, until all the grain is released.

Finally, before storing the grain for the winter, it undergoes a final sieving process. This time a sieve with small holes is used to remove bits of fine dirt, small weed seeds and other fine impurities. Before the grain leaves the threshing floor, the tax collector gets his share and the grain is taken into a grain bin (ambar).

Threshing winds down as September approaches and priorities begin to focus on other jobs. After being harvested in mid-June, some of the meadows are allowed to grow a second batch of grass and if watered sufficiently, can be harvested in late August or early September. Once again, Oshchimian men prepare their scythes (kosi) for grass cutting. This time the grass is young and tender, best suited for feeding the young lambs in early spring.

Next to be harvested are the beans. Garden beans mature first and must be picked before the pods dry and pop open. Beans must be picked early in the morning while the pods are still soft from the morning dew. Pods are picked by hand, one at a time and placed in burlap bags (vreshcha) so that if a pod cracks open the beans remain in the bag. After collection, the crop is transported home by pack animal. Unlike grains, not all beans mature at the same time and several pickings must take place. At home, bean pods are dried in the sun to remove all moisture and avoid mold. It is fun to watch bean pods dry as the slightest sound or vibration will set some of them off, cracking and literally "spilling the beans". To ensure that all pods open, they are beaten with a threshing twig (roshka) until they surrender their fruit. Pitchforks and sieves are also used to remove impurities.

As the beans are picked, an eye is kept open for the corn and grapes. If the weather is hot and dry, corn tends to mature earlier. Unlike beans, corn has staying power but is vulnerable to bears (mechka), badgers (iazoets), crows (garvan), magpies (strachka), and many other vermin. Similarly, grapes are also vulnerable to vermin and must be protected. As the grapes (grozie) begin to mature, vineyard (lozie) owners designate full-time guards (pndar). This task usually falls to elderly family members, too old to work but well enough to chase pests. Guarding goes on until the grapes are harvested, which usually takes place around Krstovden, September 14th, according to tradition.

If there is any spare time in late August, it is devoted to tilling the fallow fields for planting next year's grain crops. Actual planting takes place in September after the fields are tilled for a second time.

Red peppers, tomatoes, spices, fruits and other garden crops are also harvested around this time. Red peppers are sun dried to preserve them and are either ground into red pepper (boukovski piper) or

strung together in bunches (kiski). Apple slices and plums (slivi) are also preserved by sun drying. Spices such as mint (nagiasmo) and parsley (magdanos) are preserved by tying them into bunches and stringing them in the sun to dry.

September is also the month when Oshchimians purchase a piglet for the next year's slaughter. Care must be taken to protect the piglet from the yearling pig, which if left alone will kill it.

September is a busy month for harvest as most crops are preserved and put away for the winter. Corn is harvested in two stages, first the cornhusks are broken off, stems peeled, made into sheaves (kiski) and hung on the attic rafters to dry. Then the corn stalks are cut at the base with a sickle and tied in round bundles. They will serve as winter fuel for the fire or feed the hungry oxen if straw and hay are in short supply.

While the corn harvest is concluded, attention is focused on harvesting grapes and winemaking. Winemaking begins by first cleaning and preparing the wine barrel (bochka). Last year's wine and sludge are removed, the barrel is sterilized with ash and burning coals (spouza) and finally rinsed with hot water. The barrel is then filled with cool water to allow the oak boards to expand and seal the cracks tight. The barrel is an oval cylinder with a tap (tsifoun) at the bottom of one side and a round opening, about six inches in diameter, on the top. Some barrels have a trap door above the tap to allow a small person entry for cleaning. After the barrel is cleaned the vat is next. This is the container where the grapes will be crushed and made into wine.

When the grape experts, usually old men with years of wine making/drinking experience, have decided that the grapes have achieved maturity the word is given to pick them. Grape picking is a community affair as relatives and friends are invited to the vineyard to help pick. Grapes are collected in sturdy bushels made of willow twigs and transported to the vats two at a time by pack animal. They are crushed by hands, feet or press and poured into the vat. Everyone gets to sample the juice and make predictions about the quality of the wine. Some grapes, usually good bunches, are saved for snacking. After a few weeks or so of fermentation, the grapes are pressed and the must (sok) is placed in the barrel to further ferment and clear. The hole on top of the barrel is plugged with a wooden plank and sealed with cow dung. Dried dung is porous and acts as a filter allowing air to escape but prevents fruit flies, dust, and other impurities from entering the barrel. The pulp (komini) is taken to the local licensed distillery (kazan) and made into Rakia (a traditional Macedonian alcoholic spirit).

September is also a good time to stock up on oak leaves (shouma) to feed animals in the winter. Oak branches, full of rich green leaves, are cut from the oak trees and left to dry. They are then tied together in manageable bundles and transported to the barns for storage.

Orchards are also harvested around this time. Apples are picked by hand, transported home in bushels, and then placed in cold storage or sold at the market.

Later in the fall, gardens are cleared and any remaining immature crops are saved for pickling. Most leftover green peppers (piperki) and green tomatoes are pickled in salt brine and preserved for winter. Some are left in cold storage to mature for immediate consumption. Leafy vegetables, cucumbers (krastaitsi), and red tomatoes (domati) are usually eaten in season.

Pumpkins (tikvi), onions (kromit), cabbages (zelki), and leeks (pras) are harvested and placed in cold storage. Some cabbages (rasol) are pickled in salt brine and will make delicious cabbage rolls (vifki) and sour cabbage salad (rasol) during the winter months.

Walnuts (kastitsi) are also harvested in the fall. Some are picked daily as they are knocked off the walnut trees by the wind and rain. When it's time for harvest, any remaining walnuts are knocked off with long wooden poles. Harvesting walnuts is a messy business. The outer soft green layer leaves stains on the hands of those handling the walnuts. Many children have received the strap from the schoolmaster for coming to school with black hands. Walnuts are collected in bushels or burlap bags, allowed to dry and sold at the market or stored in a cool dry place for winter consumption.

Potatoes are the last crops to be harvested. They are dug out of the soil in late October before the cold weather sets in. A two-pronged metal pitchfork (dikel) is used to minimize damage during digging. After digging, potatoes are left in the field to dry and then placed in burlap bags or bushels and transported, via pack animals, to the cold cellars for winter storage.

If there is any free time in late October, manure is taken to the fields to free the compost heaps. Manure is also processed in the spring or as required.

Wood for fuel (cooking and heating) is also collected and transported home around this time. Wood cut earlier in the season and left to dry is transported home for use in the winter months. During the summer Oshchimians use quick burning dry wood (suarki) for cooking and baking bread.

During the Turkish occupation, the Oshchimian people owned the Oshchima forest privately. After 1912-1913 however, the forest was nationalized by the Greek Government and residents were required to obtain permits to cut wood. The most common trees growing in Oshchima are beeches (bouka), willow (vrba), and oak (dp). Less common are poplar (topola), walnut (orev), maple (ioar), dogwood (dren), pine (bor), essel (bark used for staining fabric), klenika, and gaber.

October is also a month of transition, leaving the old behind and embracing the new. According to tradition the fall-winter cycle begins on Mitrovden, October 26th. On this day communal herds are disbanded and owners take possession of their livestock. The sheep come home to the family barn to give birth to a new generation of lambs. The job of the herders is over and they are free to go home to their families.

Mitrovden is also a traditional day for sampling the new wines. Many kegs are tapped on this day and men and women of all ages shake their heads with approval as they sip the red liquid.

As work in the field winds down, the distilleries in the village are busy making more rakia, for soon it will be time for matchmaking and many weddings. With crops well secured, winter stocks well supplied, and kegs topped with wine and spirits, it's time for celebration. According to tradition, most weddings take place during a few weeks following Mitrovden when food and spirits are plentiful and the people are freed from summer chores.

The excitement of weddings winds down as December approaches and Oshchimians look forward to Christmas and the first snowfall.

By observing the sky and the surrounding mountains, the older Oshchimians can predict when it is going to snow. According to old wisdom, it will snow if the evening sky is cloudy and dreary and the mountaintops acquire a white glow before sunset. If the conditions are right, the next day Oshchimians will wake up to a blanket of white snow. Children are most excited by the snow as they anticipate the arrival of Dedo Nikola with his white beard (St. Nikola December 6th) and quickly rush outside to greet him like a long lost relative.

The arrival of the first snow also signals the start of hunting season. Hunters will clean their shotguns and stock up on ammunition in preparation for the winter hunt.

Oshchima has a variety of wild game from the rare boar (divo bishe) and goat (srna), to the common rabbit (zaek) which can easily be found. On the feathered side, the quarry can vary from the rare wild pigeon (div goulab or piskoup) and dove (prlitsa), to the more common partridge (iarebitsa), blue jay (soika), and blackbird (tsrnachka). For their pelts, hunters will also hunt squirrel (ververitsa), fox (lisitsa), mink (kounatka), wolf (volk), and bear (mechka).

Besides celebrations, hunting and other fun activities, winter is also a time of many chores. All animals; oxen, horses, mules, donkeys, sheep, lambs, dogs and cats must be fed and watered at least three times a day. Stables (aour) must be cleaned at least once a week. Paths to reach the feed barns and watering holes must be cleared every time it snows. Wood (drvo) must be split, dried and the fireplace (odjak) regularly stoked to keep the house (koukia) warm. During the winter, wool (vlna) is spun into yarn (predeno), socks (chorapi) and sweaters (fanela) are knit (sopleti) and looms (razboi) are in full production making clothes (plachki), covers (chergi) and other things. Corn (miser) is separated from the cob by hand, by forcing kernels off the cob with another cob or piece of wood. The corn is then put through a sieve (drmon) to remove pulp and impurities.

In mid-December preparations are made to slaughter the pig. Last year's piglet is fully grown and fattened with slop made of whey (siratka), bran (tritsi), boiled squash, cracked corn, stinging nettle, boiled potatoes, flour, and all the table scraps one can find. A crew of six strong men is invited to hold the pig down while one butchers it. After it is skinned and cut, the lard (salo) is melted down (ligda) and placed in 2 or 3 tin cans about 1.5 cubic feet each. Most of the meat is pickled in salt brine and placed in oak

casks (kache). Some is deep fried (jouberinki) and submerged in hot lard for later consumption. The rest is left for immediate processing. The intestines are cleaned and made into sausages (loukantsi) using traditional recipes by stuffing them with bits of pork fried in leeks and spice. The ears and feet are pickled and used later to make tasty bean soup. The hide is salted, dried and later used to make slippers (pintsi). Nothing is wasted. Even the pig's bladder is filled with air and used by children as a balloon or ball.

After the job is finished, the crew is treated to a meal of pork chunks fried in onions. Free-range pork fried in onions, gives off the most appetizing aroma. Rakia and wine also flow in plentiful quantities. Oshchimians have a tradition of sharing their bounty, especially when it comes to fresh meat. By offering the neighbours some fresh pork, when it is in abundance, they ensure that they will receive some when the neighbours slaughter their pig. Oshchimians are generous people and know how to look after each other. This generosity also extends to hunters who share fresh game with friends, neighbours, and other hunters.

The next highly celebrated holy day after Sveti Nikola is Christmas. When Christmas (bozhik) nears young men and women prepare for Koleda. Two days before Christmas the boys gather firewood and straw and build it into a cone shaped heap in the village-square. Jubilantly, they go house to house in small groups, knocking on doors with a wooden mallet, loudly demanding to be given straw and firewood. At night, the boys will light the wood heap and make a bonfire that will burn until dawn the next day. After the initial excitement, created by the sparks and violent flames of the burning straw, the children will sing Christian, pagan, and sometimes lewd songs. To amuse themselves during the night as they watch the flames dance and take turns telling stories, they will occasionally startle the crowd with a surprise explosion. They will take a stone, spit on it, add to it a burning coal then strike it with a mallet. Bang, the charcoal will explode and startle the crowd while the pranksters laugh with delight. The following morning, girls and boys with sacks over their shoulders go from house to house knocking on doors loudly and cheerfully calling out "Koleda". The woman of the house comes out and gives them each a 'kolache' (a bun with a hole in the center baked especially for this occasion) as well as some walnuts, chestnuts, apples, coins, and other goodies.

As Koleda winds down and evening approaches, the air begins to fill with song and cheer. Christmas Eve is approaching and families and friends come together to share treats, gifts, and prepare for Christmas day (Bozhik).

Early Christmas morning the entire village will attend mass to celebrate the birth of Christ. Those who fasted for the last forty days will receive Holy Communion (pricheska). After the service, it's a rush to get home to a rich and long anticipated meal of broiled pork in onions and potatoes, cabbage rolls (vifki), fried leek sausages (loukantsi), fried fritters (pitouli), fresh baked breads (lep), cookies (gourapshina), and much more. Those named Risto or Bozhin will also be celebrating their namesake by hosting visitors and receiving gifts and blessings.

After everyone has their fill they will assemble in the village-square (stretselo) to participate in or watch the women in their Oshchimian native dress dance to the traditional Macedonian songs played by the music bands. Late in the evening the festivity winds down as people leave the village square and go visiting neighbours and friends until late into the night. The following day Oshchimians are back to their usual routine except that they can reminisce about the previous day's festivities and enjoy the tasty leftover goodies.

The New Year is almost upon them and there will be more celebrating but first they must say goodbye to the old year with a game of Oshchimian poker (komar). It has been said that those who welcome the new year by winning at cards will have good luck (ksmet) for the rest of the year. During the evening, New Year's eve, families and friends get together to play a few games of komar (similar to blackjack except komar goes to thirty-one). Women and children join the game and make bets to try their luck as the dealer hands out the cards. Depending on the enthusiasm of the players and small fortune they want to gamble, the game could last well into New Year's day. The hostess provides plenty of snacks and drinks to keep everyone's spirits high. The arrival of the New Year is always more exciting than the game, so as midnight nears the players take a break to hug, kiss and welcome the New Year. Eventually before the party is over, a winner is declared and cheered for their luck and good fortune. Then as the children go to bed, the women get busy preparing the next day's feast. They knead (mesfe) dough (testo)

and chop vegetables (zeli) to make zelnik (a flaky pastry with a filling of sautéed vegetables baked in a large round pan). Depending on the size of the family, a variety of zelniks may be prepared and stuffed with onions, leeks or cheese (bourek). A delicious sweet treat (vialnik) is made with long strands of dough twisted and coiled in a round pan then brushed with honey before baking. In the modern Macedonian tradition, a coin is inserted in the crust of each of the pastries, well hidden from view. Traditionally only one coin was used, hidden in a single pastry, but in modern times the hostess believes more in creating excitement than following traditions. As the family gathers for the noon meal, each zelnik is cut into equal sized portions, one for each family member. When they all have their portion, the hostess gives the word and the search for the lucky coin begins. Children and adults alike dive into the crust, fingers slowly unfolding and feeling, eyes searching until finally one calls out with excitement, "Here it is, I have found it." The winner is cheered by all and the lucky coin is secured for at least a year to ensure it will bring luck for the entire year. In addition to celebrating the New Year, families with someone named Vasil among them will also celebrate the namesake and play host to visiting friends and relatives.

After the New Year, the next anticipated holiday is Epiphany (voditsi), which Oshchimians and all Orthodox Christians celebrate on January 6th. This is an exciting time for young men who plan to enter the diving competition for the retrieval of the cross. The traditional Oreshki pool (vir) is filled and prepared for the dive. The ceremony begins with liturgy at Svety Nikola church followed by the icon auction. To raise money, the church auctions off some of its icons to be taken home overnight. After the bidding is done, each proud owner carries his or her icon in a processional march to the Oreshki pool. Icons are held high overhead as the priest chants and the procession moves slowly towards Oreshki. When they arrive at the Oreshki pool, the priest performs the traditional voditsi service by dipping a bouquet (kiska) of dried basil stems (bosilok) into the pool's water and flicking its spray at the pool and then at the procession, several times to symbolize Christ's baptism. The crowd then chants the Voditsi chant "Krsti kreva boga mola, gospodi po milo, da se rodi bereketo i vinoto, gospodi po milo, da se rane siromasi i siratsi, gospodi po milo." The priest then gently sprays and blesses each icon as its owner presents it. Those who are in need of healing will rinse their hands and faces in the blessed water. Some will even fill jugs to take home for cooking, washing, and cleansing their home. Towards the end of the service, the priest will toss the traditional voditsi cross into the pool of frigid water. Long anticipating this moment the young men around the pool, who dare brave the cold, will dive deep into the frigid water and wrestle for its possession. The one who emerges holding the cross will be declared the victor with cheers from the crowd.

Catching the cross has its rewards and many strong young men will compete for it. It is believed that the young man who possesses the cross will be rewarded with good health and fortune. After it is recovered, the cross is placed on a tray for the priest to bless and those wet from the dive run home to change before they freeze and quickly come back to rejoin the service. The victor is congratulated by all, especially by his competitors.

After the Oreshki service, the priest is usually invited to perform private services in people's homes to bless their homes and livestock. The young men who participated in the dive earn the privilege of joining the procession of the cross that goes from house to house offering the blessing of the cross while being rewarded with coins and goodies. At the end, the cross is returned to the church.

The following day, January 7th, Oshchimians celebrate Svety Iovan and two households (one on the upper side and one on the lower side of the village) play host to visitors and guests. Hosting is rotated annually to give different families the opportunity to participate.

After Sveti Iovan the holidays are over and attention is focused back on daily chores, especially on the livestock which need constant attention. The lambs are growing fast and will soon be weaned from their mothers and taken to market before Easter. Barns and stables are getting crowded and are in need of regular cleaning. With time, the days grow longer and the snow is beginning to give way to the warming sun and the coming of spring.

As memories of the holidays fade and people are immersed in the daily routine of chores, time passes quickly and before you know it, it will be Easter and the cycle of life in the village begins all over again.

Family life in the Village Oshchima

The year is 1939 and to survive Oshchimians stick together and enjoy the safety and security of family, home, and community. They share the fruits of their labour and look after one another through lean times and sickness. They are guided by tradition and through practical experience they pass their skills and knowledge from one generation to the next.

Families live simple lives and reside in functional homes, spending most of their time securing food and shelter. The village has no running water (until the 1960's), no electricity (until the 1970's), and no indoor toilets. Oshchima has no tractors or mechanized equipment. The fields are tilled by oxen and by strong human hands.

Daily meals are cooked in the fireplace (ojak) fueled by the wood of the Oshchimian forests. Bread is cooked weekly in an outdoor brick oven (fourna). The inside of the oven is a dome about 36 inches in diameter and 16 inches high. At the front is an opening about 16 inches wide by 12 inches high. Before baking, the oven is pre-heated to the desired temperature fueled by dry quick burning wood (souarki). When it's hot and ready the loaves are placed inside and the opening is sealed with a metal plate. The plate's outer rim is sealed airtight with dough or cow dung.

In the winter, the entire family sleeps in one room to keep warm and conserve fuel. Water for cooking, drinking, and washing is carried by hand daily in pottery jugs (stomnina) from Oreshki or other springs. Meals are prepared on a bleout (cutting board) and dough for zelniks or breads is kneaded and prepared on a krank (large wide board). Stews are cooked in earthenware pots (grne) and dry foods are cooked in large, round and shallow earthenware pans (tserepna). To cook the stew, the grne is placed either at the back of the fireplace to simmer slowly in the coals or on top of a peroustia (iron triangular base with three, six inch iron legs) to boil quickly. Zelniks, pogachi (round loaf of bread 10 to 16 inches in diameter and 4 to 6 inches high) and other solid foods are placed in a tserepna and cooked in the fireplace on top of the peroustia or directly on top of the coals. To cook properly and brown the top of the food, the tserepna is covered with a hot saach (an iron semi-sphere larger than the largest tserepna with a handle on top). The saach is pre-heated to the desired temperature while making coals and its readiness is tested by the sizzle when touched by a wet finger. After the saach is placed over the tserepna it is covered with burning coals to keep it hot.

Meals are eaten at a sofra (round table about 30 inches in diameter by 10 to 12 inches high). A rogozna (woven straw blanket about six feet square) is laid on the floor and the sofra is set on top of it. Each person takes his place around the sofra and begins to eat after a blessing is said. Plates, spoons, knives or forks are rarely used as food is eaten directly from the pan. Each person breaks a piece of bread and dips it in the stew, scooping a mouthful each time. Dry foods are cut into slices and each person takes a piece. Wine is served in a stomne or small grne. The most senior person takes a sip first then passes it around the table.

After dinner the table is cleared and put away and the floor is readied for sleeping. Several Rogozni are laid on the floor and covered with woven blankets (chergi or kilimi). Pillows are made from wool and stuffed with straw. Everyone sleeps on the floor side by side. The fireplace is stoked regularly to keep the room warm. In the morning, children admire each other's body markings made by the hard rogozna.

Most people cherish family events including holidays, births, marriages, etc. Each event is ceremoniously welcomed according to tradition. When a baby is born, the person who approaches the father with the anticipated news demands pay (daimi siarik) for the surprise. Fried fritters (pitouli) are made in a traditional fashion to welcome the newborn and to treat the mother, family members, and

visiting guests. Pitouli are made with dough and are fried in pork lard on top of a sizzling, flat earthenware pan (pitoulnitsa).

Weddings are major and elaborate events. Initiation usually begins with the desire of a couple wanting to marry. The young man consults a matchmaker who in turn approaches the parents of both parties with the news. If all are in agreement, then socks, rakia and other gifts are exchanged, the dowry (prikia) is negotiated, the best man (koum) invited, the band (sfirbadjii) hired, the ox (vol) slaughtered, the wine (vino) barrel opened, and preparations for the ceremony are made (see engagement and wedding customs). Before the ceremony begins, the groom is shaven and dressed in his traditional Macedonian clothing. The bride puts on her unique wedding dress, which she and her mother painstakingly fashioned for this occasion. The ceremony takes place in Svety Nikola church followed by the reception, which takes place at both the bride and grooms parents' houses. There is much eating, drinking, dancing, and celebration.

Deaths are a sad affair. The dying must be observed around the clock to ensure proper passing into the next world. It is believed that the souls (dousha) of those who pass on (oumren) unobserved will wander the earth forever. It is also believed that, after death, the soul wanders for forty days visiting people and places, re-examining the life lived. The local carpenter is given measurements to build a casket (kiour) and a couple of men are hired to dig the grave (grob). About twenty-four hours after death, the body (mrtoets) is buried in the Oshchima cemetery (grobishcha) next to the church (Svety Nikola). A priest performs the burial ceremony. Family, friends, and neighbours come to pay their respects and offer their condolences (gospo da prosti) to the family.

Forty days later, family and friends prepare a feast and take it to church to share (daanie za dousha) with the community to celebrate the passing of the soul into the next world. Candles are lit to illuminate the way.

To honour the memory of a dead family member, once a year on the anniversary of the death, the family takes food and drink to church to share (daanie) with the congregation. This includes the traditional dish of boiled wheat with nuts and honey (pchenitsa) as well as dried fish (chironi) soaked in salt, pepper, and mint (nagiasmo) sauce, chunks of feta cheese, olives, buns (poupale), chunks of bread (pogacha), pieces of zelnik, bourek, vialnik, rakia, vino, and many other treats. This tradition is intended to help the community, especially those who have little, without obligating them. Tradition also demands respect for the dead and prohibits family members and friends from participating in festivities involving dancing (oro) and music (pesna).

At night the fireplace (ojak) and kerosene lamps (lamba) usually illuminate the home. Those who need light to go out use a lantern (fener), wax candle (sfeshcha) or open-flame kerosene candle (candilo). Before kerosene was available or at times of shortages, people used a lit pine stick (borina) to provide them with light.

Clothing and bedding for the entire family's needs are made by hand during the winter months. Women are busy knitting sweaters (faneli), and socks (chorapy). Clothing and bedding materials are woven (tkae) on the family loom (rasboi).

Almost all the food for man and beast is grown in the fields of Oshchima. Salt, oil, sugar, olives, and other items are purchased from markets in Lerin or elsewhere. Fish are purchased from Prespa. Olives, oil, and sugar are very expensive and are only purchased occasionally. One thing is never missed, simichina (a bagel like six inch round bread with a four inch hole in the center) for the children. No parent dares come back from market without a simiche for each child. The simiche is a thin crusted white bun made from wheat flour and sprinkled with sesame seeds. It has a delicious aroma that no child can resist. Even before the grocery baskets are set down, out come the simichina. A child must have great will power to resist the temptation of running to be first in line to receive the well-anticipated and expected, mouth watering simiche.

Oshchimian Migrations

During the early years, migration out of Oshchima was uncommon but as the population grew the land could no longer provide for everyone and migrations became a necessity. Temporary migrations were common prior to the 20th century but were confined to within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. Oshchima did not have enough resources to support all the needs of its growing population so people resorted to working outside the village as tradesmen. At one point in its history, Oshchima boasted having the best painters and chimney builders in the region.

It was very common for large families, with not enough land, to take up trades and travel to wherever work was to be found. Oshchimians were known to travel and take on projects as far as Epirus (central Greece), Korcha (Albania), Anadol (Anatolia Turkey), and later France, Germany, Canada, and the USA.

Oshchimians worked alone painting and renovating or in gangs cutting timber, building frames, rafters, houses, and paving roads with cobblestones. As the need to find more work increased so did the distance that these brave pechalbari (fortune seekers/migrant workers) were willing to travel.

After the unsuccessful 1903 Ilinden rebellion, Oshchimian pechalbari began to arrive in Canada for the first time. Five men, all veterans of the Ilinden uprising, left Oshchima and arrived in the fall of 1904. Bozhin Temov, Traian Gigerov, Georgi Argirov, Nikola Argirov, and Naum Popov paved the way for others to follow.

This new country was completely foreign to them. They encountered many difficulties such as change of climate, city life, language barriers, and differences in customs, all of which added to their uncertainty in finding jobs and fitting in. Those more fortunate in securing work had to toil long hours for meagre wages. They were forced to live in overcrowded rooming houses without proper nutrition. Discouraged, many wished to return home as soon as possible. Those less fortunate and without jobs roamed the streets hopelessly looking for work. Penniless and hungry they wondered what fate had brought them and if they would survive to experience happiness again.

A number of them became ill and a few died. Those who passed away were buried here, their funeral expenses paid by the contributions of their friends. Those who were too ill to cope were sent home, their fares again paid for from voluntary contributions. Their aim had always been to make as much money as possible and return to Oshchima. The few dollars brought back were never enough and many were compelled to return, seeking work for a second or even a third time. However, as the political atmosphere at home changed for the worse many of the migrants began to extend their stay. By 1913, after Macedonia's partition, some decided to make Canada their permanent home. The first women to arrive in Canada and join their husbands were Sotirtsa Stamkova and Krstoitsa Goustova. After World War I, other women followed. There is an old Macedonian saying; "Where the woman goes so does her home." Sad as it may be, many left their beloved Oshchima and made Canada their permanent home.

Benefit Society Oshchima

As the Oshchimian population in Canada began to expand so did its needs for assistance. Even though life was much easier in Canada, the fear of unemployment and insecurity loomed in the background causing discouragement and despair. It didn't help the situation knowing that many immigrants went broke and were shipped out of the country under the worst conditions imaginable. Determined that this would not happen to them, the Oshchimian community got together and came up with a solution which was the birth of "Benefit Society Oshchima".

On October 26th, 1907 the Oshchimian community of Toronto founded the organization "Oshchima Benefit Society, St. Nicholas". The first constitution was written by one of its founders, original members, and first president, Bozhin Temov. Its mandate was to raise funds and provide assistance to those in need. In 1934 the constitution was revised to widen its scope and activities. The name was changed to "Benefit Society Oshchima".

In the beginning the Society was small and financially strapped. Membership dues were \$3.00 per year, up to age seventy, after which members in good standing retained their membership privileges for

life. In 1950 dues were increased to \$5.00 per year and in 1969 to \$10.00 per year. Also in 1969 the age limit for paying dues was lowered to age sixty-five.

The constitution since 1934 has been revised several times to accommodate changes in the Society's activities and to lessen restrictions, especially those involving ownership of cemetery plots.

Thanks to the good management and co-operation of its members, the Society has done a great deal of beneficial work and has been able to exist and expand to its present size. In addition to helping its regular members, the Society, on many occasions assisted Oshchimians who were involved in World War II and left the village as refugees. Many benefits, too numerous to mention, have been rendered to its members and to Oshchimians in general, including a donation of a substantial sum to the Earthquake Fund of Skopje in 1963.

It is worthwhile to note that in 1957 the Society celebrated its 50th anniversary with a banquet and a 50th anniversary, illustrated magazine was published. Then in 1982 on its 75th anniversary another illustrated magazine was published depicting the families of Oshchimians in Canada.

Despite the many difficulties they faced since 1913, Oshchimians in Canada made considerable progress and adjusted very well to the Canadian way of life.

From 1946 to 1949 Oshchima was devastated by warring factions in that part of the world, as a result, 95% of the population left home. A great majority came to Canada in the late 1950's and took up residence in Toronto where in 1970 they numbered approximately 700. Through mutual help between related families and friends, and through sheer determination for survival, the Oshchimians in Canada have successfully attained their individual goals. As well they have contributed their personal effort in the development of Canada. As citizens, they can be described as exemplary in fulfilling their obligations to their immediate families, friends, communities, and to the country as a whole.

Oshchimian children excel in scholastic endeavours as well as in business. Numerous Oshchimians in Canada are enrolled in courses of higher education, encompassing all fields. As the years go by the community will be enriched with many talented Canadians of Oshchimian descent.

Post war Oshchima

As the Greek Civil War was coming to a close in the fall of 1949, the Greek military concentrated their campaign northward in western Macedonia. The heavy artillery and aerial bombardments destroyed most villages, forcing residents to flee. Oshchimians were no exception and most fled to save themselves. When the war was over and it became clear that Greece would not allow the refugees to return, they were sent to various East European countries. Those captured while leaving were sent to the Greek concentration camps and the rest were forcibly evacuated to Zhelevo. Oshchima for the first time in its history was empty, devoid of human life. Only the dogs remained.

Oshchimians living in Zhelevo were allowed to work in Oshchima during the day. Nightly curfews, however, prohibited them from staying. Oshchima as well as Trnaa and Roula were evacuated. They were told the evacuation was done for their own protection, to save them from renegade Partisans. In reality, however, the villages were evacuated to prevent villagers from helping Partisans who didn't wish to become refugees. When the Greek authorities were convinced that there were no more Partisans, Oshchimians were allowed to return home. Many returned but a few families made Zhelevo their new home.

For many home was no longer the same. Bombardments damaged the houses leaving broken windows, leaky roofs, and generally in need of repair. Some families lost their farm equipment, tools, livestock, and personal belongings to looters. Most had to start over again.

As tensions began to ease Oshchimians, held in concentration camps, were slowly released and began to arrive home only to find their belongings and property gone. The Greek authorities had confiscated the properties of prisoners in addition to those of refugees.

Over time and through Red Cross intervention, some Oshchimian refugees were allowed to return, provided that they were not associated with the Partisans and their neighbours wanted them back.

Life however was not the same. Morale was low and the people lived in constant fear of the authorities and retributions from Greek collaborators. There was a certain stigma attached to the relatives of Partisans or Partisan supporters causing them to withdraw from society and keep to themselves. Those who served in the Greek concentration camps were also harassed with curfews, restricted mobility, and suspicion of espionage. Many were followed by plainclothes policemen and pressured to become informants and spy on their neighbours. Strangers were viewed with suspicion and automatically assumed to be foreign spies. This was the case with Pando Stefov, an Oshchimian man who left Oshchima during the Greek Civil War and briefly came back to visit his sister. According to people who knew him, "Pando was a gentleman who hurt no one." In fact, during the Partisan years Pando was an entertainer and never took part in combat. But one spring morning in the late 1950s a Greek bullet sent him to his grave.

Pando left Oshchima with the refugees in 1949 and took up residence in Bitola, in the Federal Republic of Macedonia. At that time, Pando was having family problems and decided to illegally cross into Greece to visit his sister, Trena, in Oshchima. Pando was well aware of the situation in Greece but decided to visit anyway. As he made his way to Oshchima he was spotted in Psoderi and reported to the Greek authorities. By late night a patrol from Zhelevo was sent to look for him. They must have known who he was and where he was headed because a watch was set up to wait for him outside Oshchima. After visiting, his sister urged him to leave quickly because his presence was putting the entire village in danger. Pando took her advice and left the next day early in the morning. To avoid detection, Pando walked through the fields, avoiding the roads and headed for Albania. The patrol was expecting him to arrive along the road and as he approached through the fields, they mistook him for one of their own men. Seeing that Pando didn't stop and continued to walk past them, they quickly realized he was their target. Details are sketchy as to what happened next. Some say the patrol yelled for him to halt and fired at him as he ran. Some say they were startled by his sudden approach and fired in fear. The fact remains that a single shot was fired which wounded Pando in the leg. Then several machineguns were fired, their bullets hitting Pando in the back of the head, killing him instantly. Pando's body and belongings were searched for papers, maps, etc to prove he was a spy but nothing was found. The only evidence they found was some bread and cheese given to him by his sister for the journey. Suspecting that he was in contact with someone in Oshchima, the patrol turned their attention to finding them. They went first to Ilo Toupourkov's house and asked him if he knew Pando and if he had relatives in the village. Ilo told them that he knew Pando and that Nikola Stefovski was a relative. The patrol went knocking on Nikola's door and his wife, Sofia, answered. Without explaining why, they asked her to give them some bread and cheese. She did as she was asked and the officer in charge confirmed that the bread was a match and that indeed Nikola was in contact with Pando. Without an explanation Nikola was quickly handcuffed and escorted out of his house. Nikola was not told what had happened and why he was detained. As it happened someone mentioned that Pando also had a sister living in Oshchima so before interrogating Nikola, the patrol decided to investigate the new lead. Fortunately, Trena confessed and explained Pando's visit. Both Nikola and Trena were released unharmed. As for the bread, both Trena and Sofia baked bread on the same day with similar ingredients. Pando's body was taken to Zhelevo and buried near the road at the edge of the Zhelevo cemetery.

As radios became affordable people began to listen to all sorts of programs, including broadcasts from East European countries and the Federal Republic of Macedonia. The Greek authorities did not approve of their citizens listening to foreign programs, especially those broadcast in the Macedonian language. On many occasions policemen were observed standing outside of homes trying to determine what programs people were listening to. Those caught listening to foreign programs were accused of espionage.

As in the 1930s, the Macedonian language in the 1950's was again forbidden and banned from use. The "M" word became a dirty word even if it was spoken on the radio. Since the Greek occupation of Macedonia in 1912, successive Greek Governments have refused to acknowledge the existence of Macedonians or their language. Their claim is that the indigenous people living in geographical Macedonia are Slavophone Greeks and the language they speak is a convoluted Bulgarian dialect remaining from the Exarchists who dominated the region in the fourth quarter of the 19th century. This is

indeed absurd since the entire Macedonian population, including Oshchimians, spoke Macedonian before either Greek or Bulgarian had ever been heard.

One by one, all refugees who came back to Oshchima, from East European countries, left for Canada, the USA or Australia because they could not stand Greek oppression. They had tasted freedom and wanted more even if it meant abandoning their beloved ancestral homes. They remembered how life had been before and it was no longer the same. The people had somehow changed. They were still courteous and kind but their spirit was broken. Everyone was afraid of speaking as if their every word would be judged and they would be punished for it. Children born during this time were brought up believing that life had always been like this. There were certain things that could not be said or done, especially about the Greek Civil War.

The Macedonian language became known as “our” language and could only be spoken in private and only with relatives and friends who could be trusted. Pre-school children were constantly teased and scolded for improperly speaking Greek. If by any chance a child was caught speaking “our” language in class or in the yard, punishment ensued in the form of public humiliation (“don’t speak those filthy words”) or a good dose of castor oil.

Sometimes children sang songs about the deeds of Greek heroes, which they learned about in class. It broke parents’ hearts to know that unknowingly their own children idolized those that brought harm to the Macedonian Nation. Some parents, when their children were old enough to keep a secret, taught them that they were a different people. They were Macedonian not Greek. Other parents unfortunately, thought that it was in the best interest of their children not to know the truth and allowed them to believe that they were Greek. Their loyalty, however, was never rewarded. It was very rare for a Macedonian child to be accepted in the institutions of higher education, to work for the Greek Government or to join the military and become officers. This was not because they were incapable but because the Greek Government systemically discriminated against them. Discrimination was common practice even at an individual level. Oshchimians, like most Macedonians, knew their place and for the most part kept to themselves but sometimes during discussions or unavoidable arguments they voiced their opinions. The arguments, unfortunately, always ended with a lethal insult of being called a “Bulgar”, the lowest form of life known to Greeks. The highest education an Oshchimian child could achieve was grade six. High school was possible only for children of those who were loyal to the Greek cause.

After the fall of the dictatorship in the mid-sixties, Oshchimians were publicly encouraged by the Greek politicians to leave Oshchima because “there was no future for them there”. Many of the empty villages in western Macedonia were filled with Albanians from west central Greece. Vlachs who originally lived in the highlands of Thessaly and spent summers in the Macedonian Mountains took up permanent residence there. Many applied for and were granted the properties of post civil war migrant families.

By 1970 there were only eight Oshchimians still living in Oshchima. Since then several Vlach families moved in and took up residence, first as squatters and then with the Greek Government’s help, as legitimate property owners.

Interviews

I have been very fortunate in having the opportunity to conduct first hand interviews with the actual people whose lives have made history. The following are accounts of real events that reshaped peoples’ lives forever. It has been over fifty years since these events took place and even though memories have faded the experiences are real and are told just as they are remembered.

John (son of Trpo and Ristana)

John (Iane), son of Trpo and Ristana, was born in the village Oshchima on February 14th, 1926 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada. As a young boy John completed grade six in public school in

Oshchima then went to work on the family farm on a full time basis. John's father left the village in 1927 to seek work in Canada as a pechalbar and was not a part of John's life for twenty-five years. For most of his young life John lived with his mother and maternal grandparents, assuming various responsibilities on the farm from delivering lunch to the field workers to cow herding, tilling soil, reaping crops, and a little shepherding. John admits his shepherding career was short but memorable. One day in his three-week shepherding career, John was asked to deliver the flock overnight to a field in Polenie. The idea was to bring the sheep to rest in a field overnight so their droppings would fertilize the soil. John was still in Goendarnitsa, a long way from his destination, as the sun began to set. The land was arid and there was little upon which the sheep could graze. John had doubts about this trip, especially with hungry sheep, but it was not his decision. He continued the trek until he arrived at Koutlishcha. Darkness had fallen but he could still make out the green meadows of Filipodolou down in the valley and so could the sheep. Without warning the sheep fled, running down the hill towards the meadows, leaving John standing in their dust. The sight of lush vegetation was too much for the hungry sheep to bear. When John caught up with them he was so tired that he sat down for a rest. The next thing he remembers was bright sunlight in his eyes as he awakened the next day from a long sleep. He had never reached the intended field and told the anxious owner who had waited for him all night that the sheep were too hungry and wouldn't have been able to contribute much to his field.

Another story John likes to tell is about an experience he had as a boy one Kolenda day. School children loved to celebrate Kolenda and enjoyed getting gifts and attention as they went from house to house singing carols. Teachers went out of their way to proudly teach the children Christmas songs and carols especially for this occasion. It was without exception that Ms Cleopatra, a teacher from Solun who was posted in Oshchima to teach Greek, proudly taught the children many carols. When the day came, Ms Cleopatra anxiously waited for them at her balcony with a basket full of candy. She didn't count on the jesting Risto Stefou however, who accompanied the children and persuaded them to sing one of Oshchima's favourite carols "dedo oide na brak". This was a rude carol sung in Macedonian but was very appropriate for the occasion according to Oshchimian tradition. After hearing the song the lady became embarrassed, and flustered she dropped the basket of candy and ran inside the house.

In spite of his father's absence, John had a happy childhood. Being the only child in the Rade household he got all the attention he needed from his mother and grandparents. Compared to other Oshchimian families, John's family was well off financially. They owned a number of fertile fields and harvested more than enough food to sustain them. With their savings and with John's help, in 1942 John's maternal grandfather built a new house for the family. One year later, John met and married Petra an Oshchimian girl. Petra Raikova, daughter of Risto and Rina and one of ten siblings, was born on March 10th, 1927. John and Petra wed on December 5th, 1943 and lived in the Rade house. About a year later, on November 13th, 1944 John and Petra's first child Vasil was born. About a year after that on October 11th, 1945 daughter Kaliopi was born. With a family and children to bring up, John was much too busy working on the farm. During the Italian and German occupation Oshchimians were busy earning a living. As long as they did not interfere in the affairs of the occupiers they were left alone to their own devices. This, however, did not last too long and shortly after the Germans and Italians were expelled the liberators turned their violence on each other. The conflict escalated into civil war with catastrophic consequences for Macedonia. As John put it, "This was the death nail in the coffin of civilized Oshchima." By early 1947 John could no longer ignore the violence and decided it was time to leave. With Canada and his father in mind John left Oshchima for Athens to pick up his passport. Once in Athens, however, he received news that the Greek military was refusing to release his passport. He did not count on being drafted. With the Partisans in control of the Lerin and Kostour regions it was impossible for him to return home yet he was not prepared financially to stay in Athens. Living there would have been very expensive. Three months passed before John left Athens for Solun where he spent the next year and a half working at odd jobs to survive. Finally in October 1948 he was drafted and sent for training. For fourteen months he trained in the signal corps and served in the military for three years until his release in October 1951. John considers himself lucky that he was not sent to fight at the front in Macedonia. The same, however, cannot be said about his wife Petra. After John left Oshchima, the

Partisans drafted or evacuated most Oshchimians including John's wife. His children were evacuated with the first wave of refugees in 1948 and sent to Czechoslovakia. Petra was drafted and assigned to the medical corps where she served as a field medic, transporting the dead and wounded from the battlefields to field hospitals. Petra was lucky that she was discharged early but there was a price to pay. Two of her family members were killed in the conflict, her father and brother. In view of the family loss and as a gesture of good will, the Partisans released one family member from active duty. Being the only mother and with two young children, the family felt that Petra was the logical choice to be released. Petra's service for the Partisans was then limited to building bunkers, trenches, and providing labour as required. This lasted until late 1949 when, with the exception of the very old, the entire village was evacuated to avoid capture. Petra, along with other refugees left Oshchima for Albania and eventually was sent to Poland. About four years later, with assistance from the Red Cross, Petra was reunited with her children and lived in Poland until her departure for Canada in 1955.

When John was discharged from the military the civil war was over and he was allowed to return home to Oshchima. However, Petra, the children, and John's mother were all gone leaving him no reason to stay there. After a brief visit with his grandparents, John left Oshchima and within a month obtained his passport and left the country altogether. He left December 1st and arrived in Canada December 18th, 1951. John saw his father for the first time in twenty-five years. It was a joyful reunion but unfortunately did not last long. Both men were used to living independent lives and could not cope with each other. After starting a restaurant business together John left to pursue a career of his own. At first it was difficult, with John taking odd jobs while he struggled to learn the English language. While working at a cocktail lounge on Yonge Street to pay the bills, John applied and was accepted into college. He took a liberal arts program, the only program that did not have prerequisites. After five to six years of struggling with night school and work he graduated with a certificate.

While studying and working hard to make a life for himself, John was also hard at work trying to reunite his family. In 1952 he went to the Greek consulate requesting assistance but his plea was ignored. Frustrated with the impartiality of the Greek government John tried a different approach. In 1953 he contacted Dr. Stamburry of the Canadian Red Cross who was about to go to a conference in Switzerland where he would be meeting with the Polish Red Cross. John presented his case to Dr. Stamburry who promised him that he would look into it. Soon after the conference, John received a letter informing him that a member of the Canadian legation in Poland visited his family. Unfortunately, his family was very poor and was in need of financial assistance. Canada was willing to contribute the necessary finances provided that John was willing to reimburse them at home. An agreement was reached but John's real aim was to bring his family home to Canada. The Red Cross could not give him a definite commitment but advised him to make advance travel arrangements. John took their advice and pre-purchased airfare with British Airways. A year later on May 23rd, as his family was bound for Copenhagen, John received a confirmation call that his family was on its way to Canada. Two days later, on May 25th, 1955 they landed in Canada. The Canadian Red Cross was extremely helpful not only to John's family but to many other families in similar circumstances, for which we are very grateful.

John's quest to reunite his family did not end there. His mother was still in Poland and he wanted to bring her home. John's mother Ristana had fled Oshchima for Albania in the fall of 1949 with the last wave of refugees. She eventually settled in Poland where she spent about seven years before she joined John and his family in Toronto. His quest to reunite his mother with his family proved to be more difficult than John had expected. He turned to Canadian Immigration for assistance without much success. He was told that his mother was not of age to qualify and John did not have the financial strength to sponsor her. He did not give up but became more determined. He wrote a letter to the minister of immigration explaining his problem and asked for assistance. He was not disappointed, his appeal was reviewed and by ministerial decree John was given permission to bring his mother home.

By now John had completed his studies and with his college certificate in hand, he pursued a career in which he secured a position as general manager of the Toronto Airport facilities with CARA operations, a food catering company. At that time CARA was a small company with the potential for growth at the crossroads of development and in need of young executives willing to take charge. His

education opened the doors and helped John attain a management position. John stayed with CARA until his retirement in 1986. His twenty-six years of service took him from general manager to district manager for all of Toronto, then to general manager of all airports and eventually to vice president of all restaurant operations. In Canada, in the absence of conflict, suspicion, and accusations, John found that the individual freedom here allowed him to pursue creativity. With only a dollar John was able to obtain membership in the library and gain access to the finest knowledge the world had to offer. With less than a hundred dollars a year he was able to afford a college education.

From the day he arrived in Canada John was active in the Oshchimian and Macedonian communities in Toronto. He joined Benefit Society Oshchima in 1952 and has been an active participant in the society's affairs ever since. John was instrumental in putting together the 75th anniversary edition of the Benefit Society Oshchima book.

Pando (son of Spiro and Lena) and Leffa (daughter of Lazo and Lena)

Pando, son of Spiro and Lena was born in the village Oshchima on January 16th, 1929 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada. Pando completed grade four in Oshchima before the schools were closed due to the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war. Subsequently, he was sent to Lerin where he continued his education for six more years before leaving for Canada on July 14, 1947.

Pando's father Spiro came to Canada in 1928, just before Pando was born, seeking migrant work (pechelbarstvo). Unfortunately, due to his involvement in politics and for his activist work in the Macedonian community in Canada, the Greek Government would not allow him to return home. Spiro was very active and an avid supporter not only of Benefit Society Oshchima but of many other Macedonian organizations also. Spiro was a founder of the United Macedonians organization, St. Clement Church in Toronto, and the Canadian Macedonian Senior Citizens Club. Spiro Bassil was a household name not only in the Macedonian community but also in the entire city of Toronto.

Being unable to go home, Spiro turned his attention to studying law by day while working at night. The problems at home and his care for the common man, however, became Spiro's preoccupation and his desire to learn gave way to his passion for politics and the Macedonian community. In the years to come, Spiro became an inspiration for many young activists.

Pando was only ten years old when the Greek-Italian conflict began and even though he spent most of his time in school, he did experience the difficulties of conflict. During the summer breaks Pando came home to live with his mother Lena and grandmother Soula. The men in the house were either stranded out of the country pursuing pechalba or were drafted by the Partisans. During the summer of 1944, Pando had an experience that he will never forget. It was a quiet summer day as people in the village went about their business, when sitting on his balcony Pando heard a roar of machinegun fire at Osoi and saw the spatter of bullets coming his way. It was a German soldier shooting at the Partisans. Pando saw his grandmother fall on the ground in the yard below but for the moment, thought nothing of it. Pando realized the seriousness of the situation when his panicked mother rushed in and grabbed him to take him to safety in the mountains. As mother and son ran down the stairs, they heard faint cries for help coming from the yard below. It was Soula, shot and lying in a pool of blood. The experience frightened and saddened Pando to see his baba lying there, suffering. Soula was taken to a doctor in German, Prespa but nothing could be done. The wound was fatal and she died. The next day Soula's body was brought back to Oshchima, escorted by her son's Cheta (freedom fighters) and buried in the Svety Nikola cemetery. When he received news that his mother was killed, Voivida (Captain) Mito Toupourkovski, code named Titan, crossed over the border and escorted Soula home. Mito and his Cheta had, at the time, been fighting the Germans in Yugoslavia (today's Republic of Macedonia). The Cheta took up positions and encircled Oshchima providing security for Soula's funeral.

A while later a German patrol came to Pando's doorstep informing him that his house was about to be burned down. They came to burn down the house where "Titan" had been seen. A German officer who spoke a little Greek informed Pando of this and asked him to step aside. Among the Germans was a

Bulgarian officer who spoke Macedonian and informed Pando of the same. Pando, however, stood his ground and told them three brothers lived in this house and it did not belong to "Titan". The German officer saw no need to destroy the house and, after apologizing to Pando, left. The Bulgarian was not satisfied with the action taken but could do nothing so he too walked away. Pando believes that if the Germans had not been there, the Bulgarian would have burned the house down.

After arriving in Canada, Pando enrolled at Leaside High in Toronto. Upon completion of high school, he joined his father and uncle, Paul Bassil, employed in the restaurant business.

At age 21, Pando became a member of Benefit Society Oshchima and in 1955, for the first time he joined the board of directors in the Society's executive committee where he serves to this day.

In 1956 Pando married his first wife Pat with whom he had two children, Spiro born March 20th, 1957 and Paul born August 23rd, 1959. On February 22nd, 1985, Pando married his second wife Leffa Golichova, an Oshchimian living in Toronto.

Leffa, daughter of Lazo and Lena was born in the village Oshchima on September 15th, 1929. As a child, Leffa completed grade three in public school before her education was interrupted by the Greek-Italian conflict. At age eleven, Leffa joined the work force assuming domestic responsibilities at the Golichov family homestead. Without men to help out, like many young Oshchimian women, Leffa laboured hard to make a living. This lasted until the fall of 1948 when she was drafted by the Partisans and sent to Prespa for combat training. Her first destination was Lk (pronounced Luck), a small village near Lake Prespa where she learned, among other things, to use and fire a rifle. After four months of training Leffa, along with the other women in the camp, became part of the reserves and was assigned to duties that included transporting grain and foodstuffs, cleaning, washing and mending uniforms, and cooking and delivering food to the frontlines. During battles, Leffa was also assigned to the medic core to transport the dead and wounded from the battlefield to the field hospitals.

Leffa spent about eight months in the Prespa region before she was transferred to Kolumnati and Bapchor to support the Vicho campaign. The Vicho terrain was rough and steep making transport, even by mule, very hazardous. To make matters worse, the paths leading to Vicho were in direct view of the enemy front line. On many occasions, Leffa's transport column was attacked both from the ground and from the air. One time Leffa recalls, she looked up and the sky was black with fighter planes thundering above and raining bullets down on her. It must be difficult to kill a person, she thought to herself, as she watched the bullets hit the ground, creating wisps of dust jumping up and down all around her.

After a victory in Negush, the Partisans captured and drafted a number of young women who then became the women's responsibility to transport back to Kolumnati. It was a hard struggle for the women going on foot all the way from Kolumnati to Negosh and back, traveling at night to dodge Royalist Greek patrols. The hardest part of the trip Leffa recalls, was on the way back when the women had to cross a raging river in Voden. They crossed the river in the dark of night on treacherous terrain, swinging on a tight rope, deafened by the thunder of rushing water, not knowing what awaited in the darkness below if they fell. It was a miracle that no one was hurt. Later in life Leffa went back and took a train from Lerin to Negosh just to see how far it was. To this day, she still wonders how she managed to survive that dreaded assignment.

Her final mission before the war was over was the attack on Lerin. After spending a couple of weeks in Karadzova they were told to prepare for battle at an undisclosed time and location. When they arrived at Bigla, they saw that the artillery and machineguns were set up to face the city of Lerin but still they were not told when the battle was going to take place. They expected the attack to be a surprise ambush carried out at night. When the order to attack was given, however, it was already dawn and the Partisan frontline was in full view. After the initial contact, the response from the Royalist side was quick, fierce, and decisive. No sooner had the battle started than the Partisans were in retreat. Those like Leffa, in support of the frontlines, were trapped. They had two choices, surrender and face the consequences or run and take their chances dodging machinegun fire. Those brave enough ran and lost their lives in the process. Most, however, were too afraid to run and waited for a rescue attempt which never materialized. By the time it was over, six to seven hundred young Macedonian men and women died, cut down by machinegun fire and buried in a mass grave. Among them was Leffa's friend Trena Boglevska, from

Oshchima. It seemed like moments ago that Leffa and Trena hugged and wished each other good luck before they parted company. Trena was working on the opposite side of the frontline from Leffa. She was dead now, cut down in her prime by a Greek bullet. To this day, Leffa still mourns her loss.

In a few hours the battle was over and huddled together with two male officers, thirty Partisan women were trapped in a school awaiting their fate. Leffa ripped off the pins and symbols from her uniform and threw them away. Soon after, the Greek soldiers came accompanied by an old General. The General went from girl to girl as they sat on the floor, patting each on the head and whispering to them in a soft voice, "You saved your life by surrendering." The women were expecting the worst, but no harm came to them.

After their capture each woman was sprayed with pesticide to kill the lice and was placed under arrest in the Lerin prisons. Six days later, Leffa was transferred to Kozheni, a larger prison camp that looked like a town of tents. There, Leffa endured three months of daily interrogations being asked the same questions day after day after day. Leffa insisted that she was drafted by force by the Partisans and stuck to her story. Leffa is grateful to her brother Naso for his frequent visitations to the prison and for making life a little more bearable.

Thanks to UNDRA, Leffa was given a change of clothing that was a welcome contribution in prison. While Leffa was in prison, her family was working on her immigration papers to Canada. With her record there was no future for her at home. Leffa's father came to Canada in 1947 and wanted to give his daughter a better life away from the conflict. Leffa arrived in Toronto on August 15th, 1949, and soon after took a job in a laundromat where she worked for two years.

On September 21st, 1952, Leffa married Steve (Taskho) a Canadian Macedonian from Drenoveny and ten months later, on July 12, 1953, her daughter Elizabeth was born. Unfortunately tragedy struck and Tashko, Leffa's husband, died of liver complications leaving Leffa a widow for five years before she remarried, taking Pando as her second husband. Pando and Leffa are both retired now and live happily together in Toronto surrounded by their children and grandchildren.

Sotir (son of Risto and Vana) and Slavka (daughter of Sterio and Dafina)

Sotir son of Risto and Vana was born in Oshchima on June 15th, 1912. As a child, Sotir spent most of his time working on the farm and helping out with family chores. At age ten he was sent to the town of German for the summer to work as a hired hand, herding cattle. After that, year after year Sotir left home to seek employment to support himself and the large Boglev family. For years he worked outside of Oshchima, mostly in the surrounding villages including Zhelevo. He was also hired several times by Oshchimian families to work for them within Oshchima.

Sotir was a small boy in stature due to the poor nutrition he received when he was a baby. At his birth his mother had no milk and was unable to breast feed him so for his sustenance he depended solely on coarse foods, consisting mainly of vegetables and grains.

Around 1928 the Greek Government initiated an education policy in its new occupied territories, ordering the youth of the indigenous population to learn the Greek language by force. At age sixteen Sotir was obligated to attend public school. After completing grades two and three his teachers, satisfied that he knew enough Greek, allowed him to graduate. After that, Sotir continued to work as a hired hand at various jobs. He recalls that one of the hardest jobs he ever did was working in the construction trade. For two years he carried stones and clay (caldjia) up ladders and scaffolds. Several times he tried to enlist in the Greek army but was rejected due to his young age. Then at age twenty-four, he was drafted and served for two years in the Greek military. In the summer of 1938 he was hired by the Oshchima counsel to serve as a water (vodar) and vineyard (pandar) manager for the village for one summer. During the same summer, in Oshchimian tradition, Sotir proposed to Slavka Keleshova also from Oshchima, and in August entered into engagement. Not too long after, in November of the same year, Sotir married Slavka. After their marriage, Slavka moved in with Sotir and joined the Boglev clan. It was not too long after that Sotir found himself in need of life's necessities which the farm alone could not provide, especially with a child

on the way. So in the tradition of the pechalbars, Sotir applied for and received his passport. Then on August 14th, 1939, Sotir left home destined for France. Sotir recalls his trip took him to Athens and from there to the port of Perea where he boarded the ship that took him to France. On the way he had his palm read by a fortune-teller who told him he would take many trips and live a long life. It became true after all, said the 89 year old Sotir with a chuckle. The trip was an eye opener, for the first time he had seen how other people lived, dressed, danced, and conducted themselves in public. While passing through Athens, Sotir recalls hearing the news about a general mobilization that included his age group. Having a passport, however, gave him immunity and the authorities allowed him to continue his trip. This was a call to arms to defend Greece from invasion by fascist Italy.

A week later, Sotir arrived at the port of Marseilles to find France in economic tatters. Seeing how other people lived raised Sotir's hopes for a better life but reality was met with disappointment. He saw men walking barefoot with torn clothes and could not believe that they were worse off than he was. Luckily he made contact with his employer and on August 23rd, 1939 he arrived at the farm in d'Auvergne in Yonne province. Sotir enjoyed his job shepherding over five hundred sheep. It was hard work and involved twenty-four hours of his time but the people he worked with were pleasant and the pay was good. But as luck would have it, France fell pray to Nazi Germany and after ten months of employment, Sotir lost his job. Soon after the Germans invaded France the bombing began. The owner was the first to abandon the farm. After settling his debts with his employees, the owner just picked up and left. The farm was left to the care of his employees, many of whom were foreigners and did not see any point in dying for a job. Most packed up and left. A Polish woman begged Sotir to go but he refused. A day or so later everyone left. When Sotir came back from the pastures to replenish his supplies all he found were dead dogs and other animals killed by the bombing. Sotir panicked and fled for the Vichi Mountains, abandoning his sheep. After weeks in hiding Sotir came back, packed up a wagon with his belongings and some supplies, and left. By now there was not much food left and Sotir subsisted on boiled wheat. Having no particular destination in mind, Sotir traveled along the main road and met many refugees and columns of German soldiers. Sotir recalls that the horse he employed to pull his wagon was easily startled by commotion and foul smells and bucked a lot. At one point a German officer distraught by the whole thing ordered Sotir to do something. Unable to understand what he wanted, Sotir stood there motionless. The officer took his pistol out and placed it on Sotir's head ordering him once again to do something. Emotionally traumatized by the event, Sotir steered his horse off the road, took his bike, and some of his clothes from the wagon and drove off. This was hostile territory and not to Sotir's liking so he abandoned the wagon and biked 175 kilometers to Paris. There he met Ziso Stefov, another Oshchimian who helped him find a place to stay. French law prohibited migrant workers from accepting any work other than their designated jobs, so job hunting for Sotir was a futile effort. After a few attempts, the authorities became stern with Sotir and re-emphasized to him the country's employment policy. He was given two choices, either to go back to the farm or face jail time. Sotir got on his bike and personally paid a visit to the immigration office. He explained to the authorities that the farm where he worked was no longer in operation and that he was in desperate need of employment. The immigration office granted him permission to seek employment elsewhere. While looking for work in the town of Sens, Sotir met Yane Tsarvekov, another Oshchimian. Yane introduced him to his boss and helped him obtain a job at the construction site where Yane worked. Sotir went back to the immigration office and had his work permit extended for three years. Sotir worked with Yane from March to October 1941 delivering wagonloads of construction material. After that project was finished, Sotir, Yane, and another Macedonian from the Kostur region found work as lumberjacks. This, however, lasted only two months because the men did not have the strength to carry on due to a lack of good nutrition. Sotir and Yane quit their jobs and took the train to Paris where they heard of employment opportunities being offered by the German Government. Determined to stay employed, Sotir and Yane signed up and soon after were shipped out to Germany. Late in 1941 they arrived at a very large camp especially set up for migrant workers mainly from France, Poland, and Bulgaria. The camp was set up to provide labour for the large steel mill industry. There was plenty of work, food, and cigarettes. If one obeyed the rules life was pleasant. The mill operated in three shifts and there was plenty of work if one needed it. Speaking in Macedonian Sotir found it easy to communicate since mainly Poles

and Bulgarians ran the administration. Being protective of his earnings, Sotir always had money and did not hesitate to make loans to those in need, especially to the Bulgarians who loved to gamble. Workers enjoyed certain privileges including food ration coupons, above all others. Those who could not pay their debts with money, paid with food ration coupons instead, which Sotir did not hesitate to sell.

Unfortunately, according to German rules, it was illegal to sell food ration coupons and as fate would have it Sotir got caught. He sold coupons to two Frenchmen who were unemployed. When the police came to arrest him he was asked open his locker. Before he was searched he managed to hide his wallet under his mattress. Since no evidence was found, Sotir thought he was free and he denied the charges. Unfortunately the Germans were not easily convinced and took him to trial. One of the Frenchmen, who was a witness, became very ill and could not testify so the trial was delayed indefinitely. Had Sotir pleaded guilty, he would have been jailed for no more than four months but now his future was unclear. The trial eventually did take place and Sotir was sentenced twelve months for the crime and two additional months for distorting the truth. His boss from the mill tried to have him released early by pleading that he was a good worker and was needed at the plant, but it didn't work. Sotir recalls the jail was twenty-five kilometers away from the steel mill and the building itself was cross-shaped and housed thousands of men and women prisoners. Four-meter high walls surrounded the buildings. The American bombers continuously bombed the walls but none of the buildings were ever hit.

Before he got into this mess, Sotir received news that, back in Oshchima, his younger brother Mito and his brother-in-law Risto were about to be married. In September 1942 Sotir recalls he went to the Gestapo to ask for permission to leave the country. After much advice about what route to take they granted him leave. His trip took him to Vienna, Austria, where he purchased some clothes for his family, Belgrad, Skopje, Bitola, Solun, Lerin, and finally Oshchima. After two and a half weeks of travel he had finally arrived home. Sotir recalls his trip being uncomfortable mostly due to erratic train schedules and having to sleep outdoors waiting for trains. As soon as the wedding ceremonies were over Sotir returned to Germany. His employer paid for the entire trip and his expenses.

After serving a year of his sentence Sotir was released from jail by the liberating American allies in 1945. At this point, he had no money, passport or travel permits. The Americans had imposed curfews and travel restrictions. Anyone caught breaking the rules would be shot on sight. Sotir's first thoughts were to go back to the mill to try and find his passport, but how? After several futile attempts he finally got a ride with some Greek men who were willing to take him to the camp. His search, however, proved fruitless. The men in the camp had broken into his locker and had taken everything, including his passport. He identified a shirt and jacket of his worn by a Greek man. The man, when confronted, denied stealing the clothes and had no knowledge of the whereabouts of the passport. Helpless to do anything on his own, Sotir turned to the local authorities for assistance. The authorities informed him that if he could find a witness to prove his identity they would allow him to leave. All migrant workers, according to German law, were allowed to return to their country of origin. Sotir found a Bulgarian man who vouched for him and was given permission to leave. Prior to his departure, Sotir met Yane who he had not seen for a couple of years and who was also destined for France. Upon arrival in Paris, the men once again met with Ziso who found them a place to stay. They had a room in a boarding house belonging to a Greek man with an influential French wife. Being influential, the French woman was able to recommend Sotir for employment in a local restaurant. This was a restaurant that served soldiers on leave, sometimes up to three thousand at a time. Sotir accepted the job and worked twelve hours a day, from 6am to 6pm, washing dishes. The job was very difficult and demanding and after about a month of toil Sotir gave up and left. By now Sotir was making his own contacts and with the help of some friends in the US embassy he was able to get another job serving coffee at a coffee bar. Unfortunately, the coffee bar soon moved to a new location far away and once again, Sotir was unemployed. It was not too long before Sotir, with the help of some Greek friends from Asia Minor, found another job at a factory. This time it lasted about five months. By now Sotir had saved enough money and was looking to start his own business. In 1947 he applied for and received his permit to operate a business in Paris. The nephew of one of the Greek men from Asia Minor owned an outdoor variety shop and was willing to sell. Without hesitation Sotir purchased the shop and started his own business selling coffee, chocolate bars, roasted chestnuts, and

sweets. Soon after Sotir purchased an ice cream making machine and served ice cream. American soldiers traded their rations of chocolates and gum for cash and Sotir sold the rations to the French ladies who loved American sweets.

All the success and money, however, did not bring Sotir happiness and after seeing many of his friends leaving for the US and Canada he became discontented and was ready to leave. Having no passport, however, he could do nothing. Then with the help of his friend Ziso and Greek connections, he pleaded his case to the Greek Government in Athens and received a new passport. He immediately applied and was granted leave for Canada. Sotir sold his shop in Paris and left for Canada by ship. He arrived in Toronto on January 28th, 1948. His first job was washing dishes and a year later he opened his own restaurant. As soon as he was established, Sotir began proceedings to reunite with his daughter Sofia, who was living in Bela Trkva, Yugoslavia and his wife Slavka who was living in Poland. With the help of the Red Cross and concerned groups, his daughter Sofia arrived in Canada in 1952 followed by his wife Slavka in 1955.

Slavka, daughter of Sterio and Dafina was born in Oshchima on December 6th, 1920. As a youth Slavka received seven years of education including kindergarten and graduated from grade six. For the most part, Slavka grew up in Oshchima helping out with the farm and assisting with chores at home. After marrying Sotir, Slavka moved in with the Boglev family and stayed with them until her departure for Poland as a refugee.

Three months after Sotir's departure for France, Slavka on November 20th, 1939, gave birth to her daughter Sofia. Slavka spent most of the turbulent times during World War II and the People's Popular Uprising at home, looking after Sofia and supporting the Boglev family. Soon after, however, Slavka's world was about to change forever. First it was her episode with the Greek police. A Greek patrol spotted Slavka out in the fields and immediately assumed she was guilty of aiding the Partisans. When confronted about her whereabouts she told them the truth that she was out watering one of her fields. Not satisfied with the answer, they beat her repeatedly. When Oshchimians confronted the patrol about their actions and about their lack of evidence, they backed off and let her go. Unfortunately for Slavka the harm was already done. In addition to her physical injuries, Slavka was emotionally traumatized. She was surprised and frightened by the attack. Her brother Risto took her to a doctor in Lerin who examined her and treated her injuries. On the way home they could only get transportation from Lerin to Bigla. They had to walk the rest of the way. Exhausted by her ordeal and unable to make the trip on foot, Slavka collapsed and nearly died. She was taken to nearby Zhelevo where she spent a few days recuperating before she was able to go home. Even after nearly sixty years, Slavka finds it emotionally difficult to recount her experience. If that was not enough, on July 1947 Slavka's brother Risto was killed in action. The year after, in March of 1948, she said goodbye to her daughter Sofia who departed for Prespa with other refugee children from the village. This was an emotional time not only for Slavka and the Boglev family but for the entire village. The Boglev family saw twelve of their children depart with the refugees. In August 1948, Slavka along with other Oshchimian women was mobilized by the Partisans to serve as a field medic carrying dead and wounded from the battlefields to the field hospitals. Slavka endured many battles, including the final battle for Lerin where she served in the hills of Bouf. Then in July of 1949 her unit was disbanded and individuals were ordered to leave and save themselves from capture. Like many others destiny took Slavka to the refugee camps in Albania. From there she was shipped out and arrived in Poland in December 1949. She spent the next five years working at the children's restaurant washing dishes. By 1953, her husband had initiated the repatriation process and with the help of the Red Cross, Slavka arrived in Canada on July 14th, 1955. Slavka found life hard and lonely, especially the fifteen years without her husband. Slavka now lives in Toronto, Canada together with her husband Sotir and daughter Sofia who gave her two grandchildren to enjoy.

Rina (daughter of Spiro and Mitra) and Mito (son of Risto and Vana)

Rina, the first child of Spiro and Mitra was born in the village Oshchima in September 1923 and currently lives in Toronto Ontario, Canada.

As a young child Rina completed grade six in public school then went to work on the farm. Being the eldest of three, she also looked after her brother and sister. In 1936 Rina lost her father to pneumonia and at age thirteen assumed responsibility for running the farm. Among other things she was responsible for tilling the soil, planting, watering, harvesting, and looking after the sheep and other livestock. At age 19, in 1942, Rina met Mito Boglev also from Oshchima and married him in October of the same year. Her wedding was a happy occasion for both Rina and Mito. Rina recalls being a shy bride and according to tradition, avoided looking at the crowds. From the noise and happy laughter, however, she could tell that many had attended. The entire village was invited, as were many people from the neighbouring villages. The band was playing lovely melodies filled with Macedonian songs and everyone was having fun. Mito's brother Sotir, a pechalbar, came all the way from Germany just for this occasion. On his way to the village he met some German soldiers at the Bigla garrison and invited them to his brother's wedding. Rina recalls how the Oshchimian men stood in astonishment watching the Germans down large quantities of Rakia.

A year after their wedding, Rina and Mito were blessed with their first daughter, Fania, born in September, 1943. Rina was happy living in the Bogleva house even though it was crowded at times. Her mother in law was kind to her and so were the three wives of Mito's brothers. In March 1946, Rina's second daughter Atinka was born. Rina recalls happy times being with her family and on occasions getting together with other young mothers to listen to old men sing in the streets, then joining them with their own chorus. But as luck would have it the good times were short lived. The Partisan movement was on the rise and Mito, like many young men from Oshchima, was caught up in it. Unfortunately for Mito, he fell prey to a Greek patrol and was sent to prison in the Greek concentration camps. By now the Greek Civil War was moving northward into Macedonia and had engulfed the entire region. Rina recalls on March 25th, 1948 taking her daughter Fania to Preol to join the first wave of refugee children destined for the Eastern Block countries. On her way back Rina felt an earthquake and was certain it as a bad omen. A few months later Rina, along with other Oshchimian mothers of young children, was drafted to serve in the Partisan medical corp. Initially, Rina was sent to Ipir to guide draught animals and deliver a load of shoes and clothing to the Partisans. With her, among others, was her friend Sevda Malkova, also a mother of a young child. On their return the women were sent to Bigla to dig bunkers for the Partisans. Two weeks later they were sent to Kolomnati for new duties. Rina recalls going by Oshchima during a rainstorm and being drenched. The women begged the officer in charge to let them go home and change into dry clothing but he wouldn't let them for fear that they may not return. At Kolomnati, fed up with the way they were treated the women protested. Rina recalls Grozda Traikovska scolding one of the officers and demanding that they send these women home to their children. Finally, a decision was made and women who breast fed their babies were released. The rest were sent to the battle zones in the Kostour region. There, Rina paired up with Sevda and two other women to form a team and served as field medics responsible for evacuating the dead and wounded. After serving at Kostour for a few days, the team was dispatched to Oshchima to carry wounded from shiroka bouka to the village. As battle zones shifted they moved wounded from Roula to Preol and from Kolomnati to Roula. This lasted for about four weeks. As the war intensified, the team was sent to the mountains of Posdivishcha to transport wounded from there to Roula and Breznitsa. It was Christmas in 1948, Rina recalls, when the Greek forces hit hard with machine guns, artillery, and dive-bombing. It was terrible and many lost their lives. After that they were sent to a place near Zherveni to carry wounded to Posdivishcha. There they heard that several medic teams with women from Bapchor were killed by cannon fire from Kostour. Rina recalls being afraid and refusing orders but being forced to obey, at gunpoint. After that her team was sent to Negosh where a fierce battle took place and they almost fell into enemy hands. They were ordered to march single file through the white snow facing machine gun fire and dive-bombing. Sevda stuck with her and, despite orders, the two dashed together keeping each other company. On the way to their next destination, they found a dead Partisan stuck in the snow. Sevda decided to investigate thinking he might be German, her

brother in law. As it turned out it wasn't Gierman but, as luck would have it, when they arrived in the valley below, Sevda found Gierman dead.

As the Partisans prepared to attack Lerin on February 12th 1949, Rina's team was sent back to Kolomnati and from there to Psoderi. The Partisans began their offensive in the morning of the 13th. Rina recalls watching Partisans, dressed in white, marching four by four to the front through the snow. Thirteen women were sent to Lerin near the Church of St. Nikola to pick up wounded and carry them to Armensko. They were continuously under gunfire and the camps were filling with dead and wounded. It was so bad that some of the women were contemplating surrender to escape the torment. After spending some time hidden in a house, they decided to head for Lerin to surrender. Fortunately, they ran into a former commander who recognized them and turned them back. Upon arrival at Armensko, the sight and the number of dead bodies piling up horrified them. This horrific sight was enough to make them abandon their post and return home to Oshchima. They ran from Armensko to Psoderi and over the Golina Mountain to Oshchima. They immediately surrendered to the Partisan officer in Oshchima and told him the truth about the situation at Lerin. The officer refused to accept their story, charged them with desertion, and sent the team to Trnaa for a court martial hearing. The court found the team not guilty, reinstated them to their former duty, and sent them to Posdivishcha where they spent time hiding in bunkers waiting for orders. There they met an officer they knew who had previously served in Oshchima. From there he escorted the women to Dalipov Most between Roula and Breznitsa. Their orders were to transport dead and wounded Partisans as well as wounded prisoners of war. Among the wounded was a young Greek soldier. The women once again contemplated surrender and began to destroy documents to avoid capture. Seeing what they were doing, the soldier warned them that surrender was not a good idea. The Greeks did not take prisoners and would most likely shame them before they killing them. The women took his advice. Soon after the soldier died. When it was safe, the women moved to Breznitsa. The townspeople there provided them with shelter where they could rest and gave them food to eat (beans and buttermilk). Once again the women wanted to desert and stay in Breznitsa. After refusing many pleas, the hosts of the village told the women to leave. By being there, the women put the village in danger of being harmed by the Greek authorities. Understanding that their presence could complicate matters for the village, the women took the road to Albania via Smrdesh and Malimadi. Rina recalls the road being seeded with sharp nails, placed there by the Greek army to slow down the Partisan exodus. When they passed through Smirdesh, the local people gave them each a canteen full of water to take with them. Rina remembers the trip well especially after experiencing an appendicitis attack, which caused her much discomfort. After entering Albania the women, along with many other refugees, were taken to the port of Durasi and loaded on cargo ships. Rina and Sevda were loaded on a livestock ship destined for the port of Zgozelets, Poland. When crossing the straight of Gibraltar, at the inspection station, Rina recalls being told to go down to the cargo bays and keep quiet. For the rest of the trip, however, Rina and Sevda stayed on deck and were even brave enough to eat raw fish.

The refugees were welcomed and treated with much respect by the Polish people. Upon arrival they were given a change of clothing, donated by the Polish authorities, and then were placed in quarantine for about a month in a military camp. After that, most refugees were kept in the same camp for about eighteen months. The younger people, including Rina, helped out in the kitchens and cafeterias. The Polish authorities then announced that they could no longer provide for them and they had to find jobs for themselves. Local business and industry officials were invited to hire staff from the camps. Knowing this beforehand, the Greek organizers arranged a day trip away from the camp for the Macedonian women. This always coincided with the day of hiring and lessened the women's chances of securing jobs. However, Rina did eventually get a job in a glass works factory in Pinks. She worked there for about six months but found it very difficult. She could not get used to rushing and the extreme heat. While looking for a new job, Rina ran into a social organization run by Macedonians. They had some good ideas and helped her find a new job in the food sector. Her first assignment was to fill mugs with beer and wash dishes and pots. Slowly she began to learn the Polish language and read the menus. After another Macedonian woman quit her job, Rina was promoted to making sandwiches. Here she became friends with a French woman who helped her learn the various jobs in the restaurant and she was able to

get herself a buyer's position, ordering supplies. Rina was well liked by her colleagues and in time became a model worker and qualified for a month's paid vacation. After winning the draw she was sent to a luxurious mountain resort. Rina was alone and felt uncomfortable about going places. She did, however, agree to go and see the Nativity in a local Church. There she met two women who recognized that she was not Polish and were curious about how she got there. After some discussion, it turned out the women were Red Cross workers and interested in finding people like Rina. When the women found out that Rina was a refugee interested in returning home, and that many others were in a similar situation, they urged her to seek help. She was given an address in Warsaw where she could meet with Red Cross officials.

Upon her return from vacation Rina and Sevda went to Warsaw and after eleven days of appealing and pleading, their story was heard. Officials were curious as to why this did not come up at the camps during the official Red Cross visits. As Rina recalls, unbeknownst to her, the Greek organizers made sure that the Macedonians were sent on day trips on the days of the Red Cross visits.

Even after all this, Rina was still not allowed to leave. Greece would not accept her without a request from her husband. Mito in the meantime was serving time in prison in the Greek concentration camps. It was not until 1954 that Mito was able to initiate the process for repatriation. Rina arrived in Oshchima on May 19th, 1958. Rina's daughters, Fania and Atinka, were reunited in 1953 by Mito's parents through the Red Cross.

In Oshchima, Rina found life stifling and demoralizing. After being free to speak Macedonian and share her culture and traditions with others like her in Poland, she now had to speak Greek or stay mute. With Mito's mobility restricted to the village, she felt like a prisoner in her own home.

Rina and Mito had two more children Freda born in 1960 and Mara born in 1962. Seeing that there was no future for their young daughters in Greece, Mito and Rina decided it was time to leave their beloved Oshchima and join Mito's brothers in Canada. Mito left on September 5th 1965 to find a new home and establish himself, followed by Rina, Fania, Freda, Mara, and Mito's mother Vana on April 14th, 1968.

Atinka married Tanas a young Macedonian man from Tsrnovishcha before Christmas in 1963. In 1975, together with her husband and two children, she came to Canada where she is currently living. Mito, Rina, and the rest of the family are also currently living in Toronto.

Mito, fourth child of Risto and Vana was born in the village Oshchima in October 1916. As a youngster, Mito received a grade six education in public school after which he joined the workforce. After finishing school, at twelve years of age, Mito was sent to the village of Shtrkovo for about six months to work as a hired hand. Then at age seventeen, he was sent to France to work as a shepherd in the Ouxel Mountains. About four months later he left this job and joined his brother Krsto in Saone, France. He helped Mito find another job nearby. Mito liked the new boss because he respected his workers. When his business moved to Silemar France, Mito went with him. Mito stayed with this organization and served as a shepherd from October 1936 to January 1940. Mito remembers an encounter with a man there that had a lasting impression on him. Mito recalls having injured his arm and being sent to a doctor who, after patching him up, sent him to purchase medication. The man behind the counter looked at Mito and said, "You are not from around here, are you?" The man then asked Mito "What nationality are you?" Mito, startled and surprised by the sudden inquiry said, "I am Greek-Macedonian." The man looked at Mito and said, "You are either Greek or Macedonian, you can't be both." "Macedonian" replied Mito. "Where from?" asked the man. "Lerin." replied Mito. "Where in Lerin?" asked the man. "Oshchima." replied Mito. The man then proceeded to tell Mito that he was in the area with the French army in 1916 and was responsible for building the main road from the city of Lerin to Oshchima and from Oshchima to Prespa. The man had learned some Macedonian words and was eager to share them with Mito. He also told Mito that he employed many workers from the surrounding villages and enjoyed working with them. They were hard workers and very friendly. The experience gave Mito confidence and made him feel good about himself and his nationality. It was an uplifting experience to hear a foreigner speak his mother tongue, especially when it was forbidden back home.

After spending a little over three years in France, Mito came back to Oshchima in January 1940. On May 30th of the same year the Greek army drafted him. He was trained in combat and sent to Albania

to hold back the Italian advance. Mito recalls being dispatched from Lerin to Roula then to Besfina before going to Albania. He spent September and October doing maneuvers at Vrba Planina. Before leaving Lerin, Mito took a horse and used it to carry his provisions and supplies. While at Vrba Planina Mito, for the first time, witnessed aerial bombardment. He recalls looking at the bombs coming out of the plane. They glistened in the morning sun with an egg-like, white glow as they fell from the sky. Then came the thunderous, deafening explosions followed by carnage and the cries of the wounded.

Winter came quickly and many, unprepared, fell victim to the cold and frostbite. As the war stabilized, Mito was moved to Vrbnik then to Zhakoni and finally to Korcha. He recalls being very hungry, as provisions and clothing were in short supply. Mito witnessed artillery soldiers walking barefoot in the cold. It was Christmas and soldiers were raiding the warehouses scrounging for food when they came upon a bushel of dried corn on the cob. The officers confiscated it and none was given to those who found it.

In April of 1941 Greece was invaded by Germany, which put an end to the fighting with the Italians in Albania. The combat units were marched to Ianina and most of the soldiers were disarmed and sent home. The Germans captured some, had their guns destroyed, and sent them home but no soldier was harmed. After disarming, Mito left for Kostour where he was given a hero's welcome, including a free meal at a local restaurant. He arrived home May 1st 1941.

Not too long afterwards, Mito met Rina and married her in October 1942. By now the Partisan movement was forming and attracting attention. On one occasion, Mito and two other Oshchimians were invited and attended a recruiter's meeting at Katin Livage in Oshchima. At this time Partisans operated underground and the whole affair was kept confidential. After the meeting was concluded Mito took the dinner sack, utensils, and left for home alone. The other two men left but took a different path. As luck would have it, Mito was stopped by a Greek patrol and questioned regarding his whereabouts. His story was not credible so he was searched. They found several utensils in his dinner sack indicating that more than one person was involved. Mito was again questioned but refused to disclose any information. Suspected of aiding the Partisans, Mito was beaten on the spot, detained and taken to the village-square where he was further interrogated and beaten. Mito did not break down. From there he was sent to Zhelevo, Gierman, and Pupli. At Pupli his legs were tied to a rifle and he was hung upside down. The under sides of his feet were beaten with a wooden stick until they were bruised. His feet were then splashed with water and beaten again. This was a typical interrogation method employed by the Greeks. Mito broke down but did not implicate the other two or the person who provided the food for the meeting. Velika Iankoula, from Oshchima, had donated the food and Mito knew that she would be killed if he betrayed her. Mito knew he was in serious trouble but didn't know what to do. Someone suggested bribing the authorities so his brother Krsto was sent to offer the bribe. The attempt failed, his money was confiscated, and Krsto was arrested and beaten. Now both Mito and Krsto were in jail. The brothers spent a week in jail at Pupli. Krsto was tried, found guilty and sentenced to three months in jail or pay a hefty fine. Krsto chose the latter. Mito was sent to the Solun detention centre to await trial. Eight months later, on December 2nd 1946, his trial came up and was found not guilty. His lawyer pleaded that Mito had no choice in the matter. If he didn't deliver the food to the Partisans the lives of his family would have been placed at risk. This incident was entered in Mito's record. After being released, Mito took a bus from Solun to Lerin and walked home from there. Due to his physical inactivity in prison he found it difficult and very tiring to walk. Being free, however, gave him the energy to continue.

Mito's freedom did not last too long. On April 17th, 1947, Mito, along with thirteen other men from Oshchima including his father and brother, was detained by the Greek patrols and sent to a lockup in Lerin. There, Mito spent 105 days building bunkers and wire fences for the Greek army. Mito still has horrible memories of the 26 heads of dead men in the prison yard, strung through a wire along a fence. The dead men were supposedly Partisans and this was an example of what the Greeks do to Partisans. Some people, however, recognized the faces of the dead men and knew them, not as Partisans but as farmers from neighbouring villages. Every time the Partisans attacked near Lerin, the police would line up the men in lockup in front of the police station to use them as human shields.

After being charged with “being a danger to the security of the Greek State”, Mito was sent to Solun where he spent two days in prison and from there to Aistrati (Agios Estratios) on a freighter ship along with one thousand other men. Quarters were very tight during the journey and the men were constantly sprayed with cold water. Upon their arrival, the prisoners were greeted by approximately one thousand other prisoners. After two weeks the number of prisoners had climbed to six thousand five hundred. The men were constantly hungry. Mito recalls his father purchasing unrefined flour and making pancakes on a geramida (earthenware roof tile). As the camp grew and its administration became more efficient, food rations were increased to one-quarter loaf of bread and some spaghetti or manestra (orzo) per day. After spending some time in Aistrati, Mito was relocated to Makroniso and eventually went back to Aistrati. After spending seven years at the Greek Island concentration camps, Mito was released from Aistrati in March 1954. After arriving in Lerin, he spent three more months in house arrest before he was allowed to go home to Oshchima. At home Mito had restricted mobility and was confined to the boundaries of the village. To go beyond, he was required to get a travel permit from the police in the neighbouring village of Zhelevo. With the constant questioning, harassment, and being followed by plainclothes policemen, Mito found life hard in Oshchima. Even when applying to reunite with his wife Rina, Mito was refused several times. For missing a month of military service, Mito was fined 25,000 drahmas about 1,000 drahmas per day. There was no future in Oshchima for Mito and his family.

Mito made his decision to leave Greece and on September 1965 he arrived in Canada and joined his brothers. Mito is grateful to his brothers for providing him with financial assistance throughout the hard times and for making it possible to leave the torment behind.

Canada has been a land of opportunity for the entire family. Mito’s mother Vana experienced ten wonderful years here before passing at a ripe age of 103. Mito and Rina’s daughter Fana married Nikola Damoff from Tersie and had a daughter Cathy who is currently married and has two children of her own. Mito and Rina’s second daughter Tina (Atinka), who came to Canada in 1975, is happily living with her husband and two children. Freda and Mara, Mito and Rina’s youngest daughters are both married to Macedonians and are currently living in Toronto. Freda has two children and Mara has three.

Life in the past was not easy for Mito and Rina but they are happy here in Canada being surrounded by their family.

Lena (daughter of Ziso and Sofia)

Lena, the only child of Ziso and Sofia was born in the village Oshchima in 1924 and currently lives in Mississauga Ontario, Canada.

As a young child Lena completed grade six and graduated from grade school with a mark of 90%. Being an only child, she was responsible for a great number of household chores including fetching water from the springs, cleaning, washing, cooking, working in the fields, and sometimes looking after her grandfather, File. For most of her young life Lena lived with her mother Sofia and grandfather File. Ziso, her father, was an active pechalbar and worked away from home in the fur trade, mostly in France.

In 1941, at age seventeen, Lena married Paso Boglev who was born in 1922 and was also from Oshchima. At that time, Lambro Kozarov from Oshchima had formed a new music band and was hired to play at Lena’s wedding. This was a happy and memorable event for the newlyweds. Lena and Paso moved into Spiro and Ristana Temov’s house (Lena’s mother’s parents) where their first child Tsilo was born in 1942. Lena’s second child, Ilo, was born in 1944.

In 1946 the Greek civil war broke out and in 1947 the Partisans drafted Paso. Unfortunately, two months after the draft, Paso was killed in action on July 11th, 1947. As the civil war progressed northward into the Macedonian countryside, orders came to evacuate the children to save them from being bombed by the Greek forces. Lena along with other Oshchimian women, some of whom had lost their husbands during the Italian-German occupation and the Greek civil war, were selected and trained to assist with the evacuation. At age 24, on March 25th 1948, Lena was ordered to depart for Preol to join other women for what came to be known as the exodus of the first wave of refugee children. The women assumed the role

of surrogate mothers (maiki) and were each responsible for the needs of approximately 20 children. On the same day, children from various homes began to arrive, some riding on carts and wagons and others on foot. At the end of the day the assembly was transported and spent the night in the village Shtrkovo. Each mother was assigned a group of about twenty children and a home where they could stay. Lena made sure her own children, Tsilo and Ilo, were assigned to her care. Early the next morning the assembly was ordered to leave the village and spend the day hiding in the mountains to avoid detection and being bombed. They were asked to leave their luggage and provisions behind assuming they would be brought to them the next night. Unfortunately, their escort arrived the same day and marched the assembly to Rambli (located near the border). It was too risky for them to go back to gather their belongings. Lena recalls the assembly being led to the Greek-Yugoslav border by a man on horseback who told them to keep quiet and hide until dusk. Then each mother with her group was ordered to cross the border quietly and proceed to Dupeni, a nearby village, where they spent the night. There each group was assigned to a home and everyone was given a slice of corn bread for supper. Without their provisions, the children were left without food. After a few days of hunger some resorted to stealing and raiding the village gardens to obtain food. After a week, the groups were transported to Bitola by truck where they boarded a train that took them to Brailovo. In Brailovo each group of children was assigned to a home. Lena recalls having to sleep in one room with all the children. The room had no furniture and the floor was lined with hay for bedding where everyone had to sleep. The children cried with the pain of being taken away from their mothers and constant hunger. Food was scarce and to preserve rations, the children were fed one meal every other day. Those who left their belongings behind had no spoons or other utensils with which to drink their soup. Most meals consisted of watered down soups. On one occasion, Lena recalls asking the children to look around for something they could use to make into utensils. The boys found an empty toothpaste tube, which Lena washed in the river and shaped into a spoon. A rusty bucket was also found and washed to hold the soup. The warm soup dissolved the rust, colouring the soup red and bringing it to the surface. Lena was too hungry to waste the soup so she skimmed the rust off the surface and proceeded to spoon some soup into all the children. One old woman that was watching felt sorry and offered Lena her portion of bread, arguing that old people don't need as much food as the young. Lena hesitated in accepting it but she could bear the children crying of hunger and she took it. From then on Lena had a great respect for the woman and has never forgotten her kindness.

After spending a little over a week in Brailovo, the groups were transported to the nearest train station and told to wait for orders. Each child was pinned with a name and destination tag. From there the younger children were sent to Bela Tsrkva where they spent a week at a train station, waiting for new arrivals and re-grouping the children. The older half of the group went back to Brailovo awaiting the next transport. In four days the remaining group was taken by train to Skopje, where the children were given milk and food on the train and then proceeded to Bulkes. Unfortunately the train wagons were divided in Skopje while one of the boys was visiting another wagon which ended up in Romania. Lena didn't know what had happened to him and found out about his whereabouts years later. They arrived in Bulkes, Vojvodina on April 8th. There they were given food donated by the United Nations, were bathed and given new clothes. From there the children were taken by wagon to a nearby hospital for physical examinations. They then boarded a train and on May 8th arrived in Mikolov, Czechoslovakia. There the groups spent about a month in quarantine before they were transported to Melch for permanent placement. The children were re-grouped into pre-school ages 4 to 6, public school ages 7 to 12 and technical school ages 13 and over. Lena was responsible for a public school group of twenty children. Her duties included waking children up in the morning, helping them dress in their uniforms, supervising their morning exercises, making sure everyone had breakfast, and supervising their play until they were put to bed. She also had to make sure shoes were polished and uniforms cleaned and properly hung for the night. This lasted for about one year.

In the spring of 1949 Lena was moved to Boudishov. Here Lena, along with other mothers, was responsible for the care of many children. About twenty children were assigned to a room each under the care of a mother. Lena was offered a job in the kitchens in exchange for room and board and was also assigned duties to clear stones and weeds from the fields. Lena found life harsh and difficult to cope with

but with the moral support of a few girls from Prespa she managed and survived the next two years. She recalls having to use toothpaste for soap because soap was in such short supply.

In 1950 Lena was moved to Klokočov, a small town near the Czechoslovakian-Polish border. They lived in an institution run by Czechoslovakian administrators under the directorate of the army. The institution had a swimming pool that kept the children busy and active during rest periods. The institution housed approximately four hundred Macedonian and Greek children. Six days a week the children attended school, most of their time occupied with activities. Sundays they were allowed a little leisure and napped from 1 to 3pm. For the most part, the mother's responsibility was to supervise the children and make sure they were dressed properly, ate their meals, and attended school on time. Strict discipline was enforced with regard to dress code and tardiness. There were daily meetings with administrators to ensure that discipline was enforced. On occasion the administrators snarled at mothers for slipups. At the end of the day the mothers ensured all the children were accounted for and attended supper. In addition to her duties at the institution, Lena was also expected to attend "political lessons" offered by the Greek organizers. Also on occasion, mothers and children were sent on work assignments to the farms to assist with gathering fruits, berries, and mushrooms. Mothers and children were beginning to adjust to their new life with the exception of the usual fighting between Greek and Macedonian children, especially the boys. There was friction between children and frequent verbal insults sometimes resulted in fistfights. Eventually the Greek children were moved to a new camp, which put an end to the fighting.

Lena was also happier here, especially after meeting a lady with whom she enjoyed working. Lena was a widow in her late twenties, much too young to remain single and support her two children. After some time, her friend had Lena convinced that she needed to find someone to spend the rest of her life with. Lena was hesitant at first but came to the realization that she may be better off married. As it happened, Lena's friend had a nephew, named Lazo, who visited her regularly during his school vacation. She often spoke of him. After Lazo finished school in the spring of 1952 he moved close to his aunt and met Lena for the first time. Lazo's first wife had already remarried back home in the village of Drenichevo. Lazo proposed to Lena and assured her and her children that he was willing to accept them as his own. Lazo married Lena in October 1952.

Lazo was born June 15th, 1925 in the village Drenichevo, Kostourtsko. He completed grade six and from 1938 to 1939 attended high school in Kostour, which was interrupted before completion by the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war. For most of his young life Lazo worked on his father's farm. In 1943 he joined the Partisans, Gotche's brigade in Bitola. Lazo was part of the Egaitski Batallion from Kostourtsko. In 1944 Lazo contracted leprosy (krasta) on his arms and was sent to Vardar hospital for treatment. After his treatment Lazo went home and in 1946 married his first wife. Five months later he was re-called by the Partisans to assist in acquiring provisions and supplies. He worked until December and was sent back home. In March of 1947 he was once again re-called to active duty as a courier until July 1947 when his knee was wounded. From there he was transported to Vardar hospital via Gramos, Orovo, and Prespa which took ten days. Lazo took 105 days to recover. After that he was sent to Bulkes, Voivodina to manage a provisions warehouse consisting mostly of food and clothing. At the end of the Greek Civil War, Lazo left Bulkes and on September 1949 boarded a train for Czechoslovakia. He attended technical school for about a year and after completing his studies, he moved near his aunt and applied for work at the children's camp where his aunt and Lena worked.

A year after their marriage, Lazo and Lena had their first child Vera, born in 1953 and later their second child Iane (John) born in 1954.

In 1956 the family left Klokočov and went to Karvina. Lazo left first to find a home, then Lena followed with her young children, and finally the older children arrived. Here Lazo found a job in construction. Lena worked in a factory making roofs for convertible cars. Then on October 18th, 1968, Lena, Lazo, Vera, and John left Czechoslovakia for Canada where they joined Lena's father Ziso who came to Canada in 1952.

Since the first day of her arrival in Canada, Lena, with the help of her daughter Vera, made every effort to reunite her family. Ilo and his family, and Lena's mother Sofia came to Canada in November 1972 followed by Tsilo and his family in August 1980.

Lena is grateful to the Eastern Block countries, especially Czechoslovakia, for their hospitality and the educational opportunities they provided to the Macedonian refugee children.

Trpo (son of Vane and Petra)

Trpo, son of Vane and Petra, was born in Oshchima on October 26th, 1933. As a child, Trpo spent most of his time working on the farm and helping out with family chores. Trpo was able to complete grade four before events forced schools to close. Trpos's father was originally from Rula but after marrying Petra he moved to Oshchima to live with his wife's family. Trpo has two sisters, Stojna and Marijana, currently living in Skopje.

When asked what he remembers from Oshchima, the sixty-eight year old Trpo smiled and replied, "Many things." He remembers, at age eight, tending the community sheep herd, working in the fields, and herding cows. "I was five years old going with my grandfather (dedo) to plough a field when we decided to stop at the Moisiejov store to pick up some candy for me. My grandfather had poor eyesight and did not see the policemen coming towards us as he lit a cigarette. Smoking home grown tobacco was illegal.

Dedo, I said, the police are coming, put out your cigarette. Dedo quickly tossed his cigarette and pretended nothing happened. Unfortunately the policemen saw him and as they passed by they gave him a warning. We were lucky this time." When asked what else he recalled from Oshchima, Trpo had a little story that went something like this. "I was six years old when my mother and I went to the village Vrbnik to visit the dairy (bachilo) where my father worked. When we arrived I saw three wooden flutes belonging to the shepherds, all covered in butter. They were left there to soak and keep from drying and cracking. My eye caught the flutes and I could not get them out of my mind. I wanted one but didn't know how to go about getting it. Finally, just before leaving, I got enough nerve and pinched one. I stuck it in my pants and covered it with my shirt. It was very long and extended from the top of my knee to the bottom of my neck. I was not seen, and to this day I am still amazed as to how I did it. After we left the dairy to head for home and were a few kilometers away, I pulled the flute out and began to play it. My mother must have been distracted because she said nothing until I got her attention and showed her my prize. When she looked at me she could not believe her eyes. I was covered in butter from neck to toe. I was not allowed to keep the flute. It was returned to its proper owner on our next visit to the dairy. My punishment was light."

Trpo had a nickname and to his peers in Oshchima he was known as Trpo the bomb (boumbata). The story goes something like this. "My father and I were ploughing one of our fields at Stara (old) Oshchima. I was in the nearby brook securing the mule and donkey while my father was busy ploughing the field when Pando Kozarov arrived with a small axe in his hand. Some time ago an English bomber had crashed with its bombs still aboard. The crash left unexploded bombs all over the place. Pando approached one of the bombs and raised his axe, ready to strike it. He called out to my father and asked him to give him a sack of grain or he would explode the bomb. He said 'I am poor and have nothing to live for, my family is hungry and will die of starvation unless I can provide for them. If you don't give me the sack of grain, I swear I will blow up the bomb.' My father did not know what to make of this. Pando was crazy enough to do it. My father was more concerned for me than for himself so he tried to warn me, 'Trpo run the bomb will explode, Trpo the bomb, Trpo the bomb.' Unbeknownst to my father and me, the whole thing was a joke. Pando, however, found much humour in it and spread the news to the whole village. My friends also found the whole thing very humorous and I became the butt of their jokes. After some time I resigned myself to the fact that my friends would always call me Trpo the bomb and graciously accepted my nickname."

When asked to tell some more of his life's story, Trpo became serious and recalled an event that changed his life forever. In 1946 or 1947, his father, to make a living, traveled from village to village purchasing and selling goods. As luck would have it one day, while heading for home Trpo's father, Vane, was stopped by the Greek military police. Vane was traveling with a little girl, a family member, as they left the village of Luk. The little girl was too young to walk so she rode the mule. According to Trpo, the

mule arrived at home with the little girl but his father was nowhere to be found. The girl was too young and unable to tell what had happened or where they were coming from. After a frantic search by the villagers, Vane was finally found beaten unconscious and tossed inside a thorn bush. Vane spent six weeks in bed recovering from his ordeal. His flesh had turned black and in places had peeled off the bone. Vane was suspected of being a courier for the Partisans and carrying secret messages from village to village. Vane, however, was never a courier and had nothing to do with the Partisans. The police did not believe him and were not satisfied with his answers so they decided to torture him. In the usual fashion, they tied his feet tight between two rifles, raised him upside down and beat his feet, legs, and body with a thin heavy stick. Vane knew nothing and could reveal nothing, but his innocence did not save him from harsh punishment. After about twelve hours of torture, Vane passed out and could not be revived so he was tossed in the bushes and left to die.

After six weeks of recovery in bed, Vane finally felt well enough to take a walk. His first visit was to the Svety Nikola church to light a candle and pray to God for saving his life. Vane was no longer the same man, the incident had crushed his spirit and left him disabled with a permanent limp. As if this wasn't enough, on his way back from church Vane heard Georgi Prespakov calling out for all men between the ages of fifteen and sixty five to immediately report to the village square. This was indeed a black day for Vane and for the village of Oshchima. On this day, fifteen men, including Vane were detained and sent to prison in the Greek concentration camps.

About a year later because of his bad legs Vane, along with other disabled prisoners, was given amnesty and released from prison. When Vane reached Oshchima he found his home empty. His wife and older daughter Stoja had joined the Partisans, Trpo has left for Bulkes, his daughter Marijana left for Poland with the refugee children, and his youngest son Stavre (Talje) left for Bela Tsrkva with the refugee children. Left all alone, Vane enlisted with D.A.G. and stayed with them to the end of the Greek Civil War after which he fled to Yugoslavia.

Trpo left Oshchima with the refugee children. Trpo recalls it was March 25th, 1948 when the order to save the children was put into action. The program was sponsored by the Partisan movement and called for the evacuation of all children under fourteen years of age from the areas under attack. Trpo wanted to go but unfortunately he was over fourteen and did not qualify. Fearing the wrath of the Greek airforce and the constant pounding of exploding bombs, Trpo was determined to leave. His chance came three days later when he saw the children from Tourie and other villages escorted past Oshchima to Prespa. Trpo along with Kole Shkembarov, Ristana Nanovska, Gotche Filkov, and Sotir Kozarov joined the group and left. They arrived in Shtrkovo before nightfall and spent the night there. Before dawn they were escorted to the mountains where they spent the day. There the children from Oshchima were separated from the Tourie group and assigned to Tinka, a mother from Lagen. The same night they crossed the border into the present day Republic of Macedonia at the Markova Noga crossing. There, two groups of twenty-five children were loaded into each truck. The trucks were covered with tarps and as they approached Bitola and the children were told to keep quiet to avoid detection. When they arrived, Trpo recalls being unloaded and placed in what looked like comfortable, well-lit, hotel rooms and each child was given a blanket. The next morning when they saw tracks and wheels they realized they were on a train bound for Skopje. Inside of the train they were welcomed by women in uniforms with the insignia AFZ (Anti Fashistiski Sojuz na Zhenite). When they arrived in Skopje, they were served bread rolls and marmalade. Trpo and many of the other children had never tasted marmalade before. They kept going back for more until they were full; saving anything uneaten for later. From there, after two days of travel, their first destination was Belgrade where boys and girls were bathed together, given clothing, and interviewed for personal information. From there, their journey took them to Plandishcha, Voivodina where Trpo spent the next three months. Life was difficult, Trpo recalls, they missed their families and there was very little food to eat, especially bread. Macedonian children were used to eating a lot of bread at home, which was now absent from their diet. One day some children got enough nerve to open the camp's massive wooden doors and bolted out. Many escaped into the fields wanting to go home but were soon rounded up and sent back to the camp.

After spending three months in Plandishcha, most of the children were transferred to Bela Tsrkva, a military camp that was run military style. Trpo spent the next seven months there before he was enlisted. A committee from Bulkes came to the camp looking for boys to enlist. Anyone with a large stature and who was physically fit was separated and transferred to the military camps in Bulkes. Trpo recalls that Bulkes was like a state within a state with its own radio station, transmitting in both Greek and Macedonian, news services, cultural houses, factories, and perhaps even its own currency? Eighty-eight boys left Bela Tsrkva and remained together in Bulkes where they were given jobs to work in the fields for six hours a day and military training for another two hours. One by one the boys were sent into action and after a few weeks only eight remained. Of the eighty sent into action, most were killed, and some returned to the camp wounded. Trpo contracted an ear infection and was temporarily unfit for military duty, which probably saved his life. After being admitted to a local hospital he sought permission from the Serbian police and left Bulkes for Krousheвле. He told the police he had a brother there and wanted to see him. When he was asked what his brother's name was, Trpo told them Giro Keleshov. Giro was the only person Trpo knew who lived in Krousheвле. "How come your brother has a different name?" he was asked. Trpo did not know what to say but seeing that he was sick and eager to leave, the policemen granted his request. Trpo spent two months in Krousheвле and two more in Panchevo where he took a short educational course in water works. By then he found out that his father, mother, brother, and sister had left Oshchima in the fall of 1949 and were now living in the town of Trakanie. It was in the spring of 1950 when Trpo arrived in Trakanie. There he found his family living in poverty. His mother and sister, out of necessity, were forced to beg for food from the local churches. Fortunately, this did not last too long and soon after the family went to Kochani where they spent the next three months before moving to Skopje. They entered Kochani as political refugees and were not allowed to leave the area without permission. Trpo recalls that his identification card had a red line in the center, indicating limited mobility. His father, however, wanted to work and convinced the authorities to allow him to go to Negotino Vardar in Doubrovo and seek employment. Soon after Vane's departure, the rest of the family left and took up residence in Skopje. There, Trpo trained as a painter and got his first job painting houses. Then in 1956 he changed jobs and went to work in a factory painting cars. He spent the rest of his career there until he retired in 1990. The same year that Trpo changed jobs he met Trijada and fell in love. A year later they were engaged and a year after that they married. The wedding took place on August 10th, 1958.

Trijada, daughter of Lazo and Kostadinka from the village Banitsa Lerinsko, immigrated to Skopje in April of 1955 to join her father. Trijada was born on October 26th, 1940 and completed grade six in the local public school before she began work on the family farm and trained to become a seamstress. With the outbreak of the Greek civil war, Trijada's father was drafted by the Partisans and remained a soldier until the conflict ended. Like many others, to save his life Lazo left his homeland as a refugee and ended up in Skopje. He made many attempts to return home with no success. The evidence against him was overwhelming. At one point the Greek authorities circulated a letter with Partisan logos containing Lazo's signature. Failing to return home, Lazo attempted to reunite his family in Skopje and start a new life there. The Greek government agreed to release his family and issue passports provided the family signed a declaration that once they were gone they would never return. To this day Trijada has not been allowed to go back, not even for a visit.

As a young lady Trijada found life in the village harsh and full of fears. During the Greek Civil war while her father was with the Partisans, the Greek secret police used many tricks to punish those helping the Partisans. Trijada recalls strange men pretending to be Partisans coming to her house and asking for bread for her father. But Trijada's grandmother was too clever for them and always sent them away, telling them that she had none to spare. Families who fell for the tricks found themselves trapped in the clutches of the Greek police. The very next day they found themselves accused of aiding the Partisans with the evidence presented before them for all to see. Many were severely tortured as a result of this trickery. Trijada recalls, night after night, neighborhood boys being rounded up and escorted by the police to a military camp lockup. They spent the nights locked up like animals to prevent them from leaving the village and joining the Partisans.

Once she joined her father in Skopje, Trijada's fears were left behind. She used her skills as a seamstress to find a job in a textile factory making socks, blankets, etc. Trijada worked there for about four years until the birth of her first son Doncho. Doncho was born on February 5th, 1959. Four years later, on January 12th, 1963 Trijada gave birth to her second son, Vasil. Unfortunately, Vasil was born ill and spent his entire life in bed cared for by Trijada. After many attempts to correct the problem, including brain surgery, Vasil could not be cured and died on February 5th, 1982 at age eighteen. Trpo and Trijada tried hard to save their son including taking a trip to former Czechoslovakia and spending time from 1969 to 1972 pursuing various medical treatments and surgeries. In the meantime, Doncho stayed in Skopje and pursued his studies, which eventually led him to a mechanical engineering degree. After seven years and two jobs in Skopje, Doncho decided to pursue his career abroad. He applied and was accepted as an immigrant in Canada. Trpo and Trijada felt that there was nothing more for them to do in Skopje so when Doncho asked them to join him, they accepted and arrived in Toronto on April 8th, 1994. Both Trpo and Doncho sought out, as new immigrants with origins from Oshchima, joined, and became life long members of Benefit Society Oshchima. Trpo and Trijada currently live in Bramalea, Ontario, Canada with their son Doncho and granddaughter Vasse.

Petre (son of Paso and Lena)

Petre, son of Paso and Lena was born in Oshchima in 1923 and died at age 24 in 1947. He was the first Partisan from Oshchima to die in action. Fellow Oshchimians Nikola Stefou and Dimitar Toupourkovski tell his story. Dimitar's accounts were obtained from page 22 of the May 1975 issue # 265 of the Macedonian Magazine. Most of Nikola's accounts come from a boy named Vasil from Bapchor whom Nikola met while serving in the Greek concentration prison camps. Vasil was an eyewitness to Petre's ordeal during the last days of his life.

In 1928, Petre's father Paso left Oshchima for Australia to seek work as a pechalbar and never returned. Petre, the eldest of three brothers (Done and Risto), was five years old at the time and was left in the care of his mother and grandmother. After finishing grade six in public school, Petre assumed responsibility for managing the household and farm. His family was poor and on many occasions Petre had to seek work outside the home to make ends meet. Prior to the occupation (before 1941), Petre took on odd jobs including road construction work. During the occupation he regularly traveled in and out of Albania, purchasing and selling fabrics.

Petre was a bright young man and did not agree with the injustices of the Greek Fascist regime; especially the inequalities created between Macedonians and Greeks. It was no surprise that he and a friend, Lazo Stefou, were the first from Oshchima to sign up with the Partisans. The promise of equal rights inspired the duo to take a trip to Malimadi and make contact with the Partisans. Unfortunately, soon after their trip Lazo had a severe appendicitis attack, which ended his life. Petre went on and joined the political wing of the workers revolution and worked hard to fight exploitation. During the occupation, Petre joined the antifascist uprising and organized the collection of arms and ammunition and recruited members for his organization. During the spring of 1943, in the Lerin and Prespa regions, when the first Partisans began to organize Petre was one of the first to volunteer.

During the conflict Petre proved himself to be brave and decisive. He was an excellent organized and able leader both politically and militarily. During one of his missions Petre was severely wounded but was lucky to escape with his life. A mortar hit the barrel of his rifle and exploded on contact. The rifle was completely obliterated and he received severe burns on his hand and a gushing wound through his throat. He was taken to a hospital in Yugoslavia where, after several surgeries, he recovered.

By 1945 Petre was back on his native soil and ready to fight for what he believed. During the Greek Civil War he was one of the first to enlist and became one of the first organizers in the region. He became a member of the Peoples Freedom Fighters and joined the Presidency of the Youth Organization for the Lerin Region. He was well liked by all Oshchimians and moved freely, in and out of his home even in

daylight, without any fear of being reported to the Greeks. Unfortunately this fearless, battle hardened fighter of many battles and volunteer of volunteers took too many risks during his missions and one day he fell prey to the enemy. After blowing up several trucks on the railroad connecting Lerin to Soloun and successfully completing his mission Petre ran into enemy fire. During the skirmish Petre was severely wounded. With both legs broken he lay immobilized awaiting his fate. When the enemy approached he agreed to surrender but the enemy's enthusiasm was cut short when he pulled out his Thompson cutting them to pieces, and then he shot himself. Near the village of Tserevo, on March 23rd, 1947 to avoid capture, Petre took his own life and became the first Oshchimian to die for Macedonia. Even in death his enemies did not let him rest. The Monarchist Fascists took him to Sourovich and in the City Square they hung his body in full view as a reminder of what would happen to Macedonians who dared stand up and fight for their rights. With heavy hearts and tears in their eyes the people of Sourovich paid Petre their last respects.

Sevda (daughter of Georgi and Dafina)

Sevda, daughter of Georgi and Dafina was born in the village Oshchima on April 11th, 1937 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada. Sevda is the fourth of six siblings, the eldest being sister Trena followed by brothers Pando and Vasil then Sevda followed by sister Petsa and brother Mito.

As far as Sevda can recall, her lineage extends back to pre-dedo Iane Boglev who was the son of Mitre and Dafina (Postolovska from Rula). Iane was born in 1872 and married Dafina Asprova with whom he had six children named Naum, Sojna, Lambro, Lena, Sofia, and Georgi, Sevda's father.

Georgi, Sevda's father was born in 1909 and married Dafina Dimova in 1929. Dafina Dimova, daughter of Mitre Dostin Dimov and Velika Argiris Dimov, was born in 1909. Mitre and Velika had six children. Sevda was only three years old when Italy declared war on Greece in 1940 and as a result, received no primary education.

Even though it has been over fifty-five years since Sevda left the village, many memories of life in Oshchima are still clear in her mind. Her most vivid ones are of her father tending to the beehives and offering her bits of sweet, delicious honey. She remembers swinging a wooden mallet breaking clumps of soil in the fields and assisting her brother Vasil in taking the oxen to pasture. Sevda's family was poor and her parents had to work hard to make a living. In those days everyone was expected to work hard, even children.

There were also sad memories in Sevda's life like the time in 1945 when her father left home for the mountains. Sevda could not understand why he had to leave and join the Partisans to fight a war. As if that was not enough, soon after, her oldest sister too left home to fight in the war. Both father Georgi and sister Trena had no idea of the sacrifices they would be making when they joined the Partisans but they did it because they believed that sacrifices had to be made in order to improve the lives of fellow Oshchimians and Macedonians alike.

Soon after she joined the Partisans, Sevda's sister Trena, at age 18, lost her life to a Greek bullet in 1947 in the village of Niegosh. Georgi joined the Macedonian Partisan brigade in 1945 and crossed over the Yugoslav border to help liberate what we today call the Republic of Macedonia. For the most part, Georgi's role was to secure provisions and cook for the troops. Unfortunately, during one of his missions he was captured and executed by the Greeks. Georgi lost his life in 1948, at age 39, in the village of Bukovik in the Kostur region.

Sevda remembers a story she was told about how her father, after receiving a serious wound, came back to Oshchima but would not go home. Fearing he may die from his wound he came back to see his family for one last time. Also fearing that he may be seen by enemy eyes and put his family in danger, he spent the night hiding in the bushes hoping to get a glimpse of his loved ones. Fortunately, he was discovered by good neighbours and was taken to a hospital in Albania (Albasan) for treatment.

As the Greek civil war intensified and moved up into Macedonia, the Partisans became more dependent on the services of the local population and inducted more and more women into the war effort. Even

mothers with young children, like Sevda's mother Dafina, did not escape the draft. Like many Oshchimian women, Dafina's role in the war was as a cook, baker, and seamstress by day and field medic by night.

By 1948 the war had intensified to a point where Macedonian villages became daily targets for Greek bombers which placed the civilian population in peril. It was under these circumstances that the so-called temporary "save the children" program was conceived and put into action for the first time in Oshchima on March 25th, 1948.

It was a cool March day when the exodus began. Children were crying and screaming while mothers holding back their tears placed their loved ones in the hands of surrogate mothers for the first time in their lives. By noon all children under the age of 16 were gathered together, belongings in hand, and left Oshchima not knowing that they would never be allowed to return. The trip was long as they climbed over Mount Preol, but before nightfall they reached their first destination, Orovnik, Prespa.

It was not one but four children Dafina had to let go. She couldn't go with them; the Partisans would not allow it as she was needed to maintain the war effort. Although she did not know it then, the war had already taken her firstborn and now four more of her children were gone. Vasil, Sevda, Petsa, and Mito left. Only Pando remained but he too was not at home. Pando was sent to Lehovo with other Oshchimians to purchase salt but unfortunately he was captured by the Greek army and taken to Lerin and was not allowed to leave.

When they arrived in Orovnik the children were divided into small groups and sent to several houses to spend the night. It was a long sleepless night as they missed their mothers and wondered what would happen to them. They were told they were going to Romania.

Early the next morning the children were gathered together and, as a group, were escorted to the mountains for safety. To Sevda's horror, Petsa was missing and was nowhere to be found. Search teams were put together looking everywhere but Petsa was still, nowhere to be found. Petsa's disappearance weighed heavily on Sevda but what could she do? She couldn't get the idea out of her mind that some wild animal, perhaps a bear, had caught her and carried her off far away. No one expected that a nine-year-old would ever cover that distance home safely. But Petsa did and remained with her grandmother until the next exodus in the spring of 1949 when she along with other Oshchimian children, was taken to Hungary, accompanied by surrogate mothers Kita Keleshova and Sofia Florenchina.

The stay in the mountains of Orovnik was supposed to be for a day so the children were told not to bring their belongings with them. But that's not what happened and many of the children to this day believe they were purposely deceived, and their belongings stolen by their Greek escorts who intentionally left them to suffer from hunger and cold.

The children spent two days in the mountains before they were escorted over the border to Ljubojno. There they found children from other villages from all over the Lerin and Prespa regions. In Ljubojno the children were divided into groups of thirty to fifty and were assigned to designated houses where they ate and slept. The meals consisted of a small chunk of corn bread and some water. Hunger was so overpowering that it made the children envious of the little birds flying free and picking corn kernels off the cobs hanging in front of the houses.

After spending a week in Ljubojno the children were loaded onto trucks and taken to the railroad yards outside Bitola. Hungry, half-naked, and full of lice the children were tired and took to the empty German horse-transport cars and slept securely in the warmth of the hay.

A week later, orders were given to separate the children by age groups. Many siblings did not want to be separated and fought back with tears and screams, but they were told that soon enough they would be back together again. The youngest had to leave first, to save them from starvation. All the children were crying as the five and six year olds were separated and taken away. It was not enough that Sevda lost her sister Petsa but now she watched her youngest brother Mito disappear from her sight.

The next day the remaining children were loaded on train cars and sent north to Bulkes where they spent a little over a month before they were permanently relocated. By the time they reached Bulkes, both Sevda and Vasil were sick and taken to a local hospital. There they received a surprise visit from their uncle,

Petre Asprov, who they knew to be missing in action and believed to be dead. Petre offered to take Sevda and Vasil to stay with him, but their desire to catch up with Mito was too strong and they declined.

Bulkes was a Greek town teeming with activities geared towards supporting the war effort. Food was plentiful and the children spent most of their days living in empty schools and warehouses. Besides the Macedonians, there were also children from Epirus and Thessaly.

As soon as they became comfortable however, the children were on the move again. Sevda remembers it was a few days before Easter when the children were once again loaded into train cars, given some food, and sent off to various destinations. Unbeknownst to them, they were again separated and some were sent to Hungary, Romania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia while the youngest remained in Yugoslavia.

Luckily, Sevda and Vasil stayed together and were sent to a town called Mikolov in Czechoslovakia. There with the help of designated surrogate mothers, Fania Petkovska, Lena (Pasoitsa) Boglevska, and Trena Argirovska from Oshchima, the Czech authorities stripped the children of their lice infested clothing, cut their hair, and gave them a bath. It was a new experience for the Macedonian children to be bathed in public baths all naked in front of so many people. The local buildings and baths had once belonged to the German soldiers, but since the evacuation, they became a haven for the refugee children of the Greek civil war.

After spending time in quarantine, about 30,000 children were taken to Melch where they were assigned quarters and schoolmasters. Morning started with exercise and a good breakfast. The Czech teachers were professionals, trained in child psychology, who did their best to educate the refugee children. In addition to the regular curriculum, the children were expected to learn various languages including Czech, Greek, Macedonian, and Russian.

Sevda recalls writing her first letter in Macedonian. It was to her mother, written in 1949 from Melch on the back of a photograph. Sevda still has and treasures the letter-photograph, dated December 30th, 1948. With the war still going on, Sevda felt there was no chance that the letter would reach her mother, but there was always hope. As it turned out, Dafina did receive the letter and sent Sevda a reply, unfortunately with sad news. This was the first time that Sevda learned of the deaths of her father and sister. It was a bitter moment for both Sevda and Vasil as they received news of the fate of their family. After spending about six months in Melch, the children were again divided into age groups and assigned to various grades. Sevda, along with 2,000 other children was sent to Klokočov to further her studies. After that, Sevda was sent to Prague where she enrolled in nursing school and studied nursing for about a year before her education was again disrupted, but this time for good reason. She was about to join her mother.

When the civil war was reaching its climax, to avoid capture or death, most Partisans along with the civilian sympathizers and family members, left home for Albania. After the conflict was over, Greece did not want them back and many were shipped to various eastern countries that were willing to take them. Dafina ended up in Poland where she immediately began to search for her children.

Thanks to the undertakings of the Red Cross, the names and whereabouts of many of the children were registered and were of much help in locating missing persons. Three months after Sevda started looking, she found her mother in Zgozelets, Poland.

It was 1953 before Dafina was able to find Petsa, but once she did the Red Cross helped her in bringing them together. Petsa had not seen her mother for five years and did not recognize her when they first met. It was difficult for both of them until they adjusted to one another. Sevda and Vasil were next to join their mother in Poland.

It was here in Poland in 1955, that Sevda first met Tashko her future husband. Tashko was visiting his sister who was a friend of Sevda's sister Petsa. Tashko was in school at the time and frequently visited his mother, who happened to live in the same apartment complex as Sevda's mother. Sevda had a wonderful time with Tashko but their relationship abruptly came to an end when Tashko's family left Poland for Paprasko, Tasko's hometown. As it turned out however, Greece would not allow the family to cross the Greek border and they ended up going to Bulgaria instead.

Mito, Sevda's youngest brother was still missing, for now, but would be found later in Bela Tsrkva, Yugoslavia and would be re-united with his family in Canada in 1955.

The whereabouts of Pando was still unknown. He had been captured by the Greeks and taken to Lerin. Because he was under sixteen years of age and had no record, he was released but confined to the borders of Lerin. Pando had an aunt, Ristana, who lived there and he stayed with her until the war was over. Then in 1951 with the help of Aunt Mara and Uncle Naun Boglev he emigrated to Canada.

In Canada, Pando was free of the turmoil that had gripped his homeland but was unhappy without his family. In 1953, he married Fana Talis from Statitsa and a year later their daughter Julie was born. But still there were things missing in his life. He wanted to be with his mother and siblings.

After a long search Pando located all members of his family. He was re-united with Mito first in 1955, then on August 17, 1956 his mother Dafina and his sisters Sevda and Petsa arrived. Vasil was not allowed to leave due to some bureaucratic complications with the way he was registered in Poland. Vasil had to wait another six years before he could join his family. Thankfully, all brothers and sisters are now together and living in Canada.

The re-unification brought Pando happiness but misfortune struck in 1957 when his 23 year-old wife died from heart complications. Pando re-married later, taking Sofia Mitani from Zhelevo as his second wife. They had a son George and two daughters Rosa and Lily. All their children are now married and Pando and Sofia have seven grandchildren.

Petsa married Nikola Pavlovich from Lafsi and had two daughters named Cathy and Donna both married with children.

When Vasil came to Canada he gave Sevda, Tashko's address in Bulgaria. After seven years of separation, Sevda immediately made contact with Tashko and they corresponded by letters, resuming their relationship. Sevda still has and treasures the letters she received from Tashko. She wants them buried with her when she passes on. The relationship took a serious turn when Tashko asked Sevda to go to Bulgaria and get married. Sevda wanted to leave right away but was not a Canadian citizen and knew that without citizenship she couldn't bring Tashko to Canada. After becoming a Canadian citizen in November 1963, Sevda left for Bulgaria not knowing that it would take her two years before she would come back.

After spending seven years apart, Sevda was glad to be back with Tashko after meeting with him in Sofia, Bulgaria. They did not waste much time after meeting and arranged to be married at city hall on December 28th, 1963. When they arrived at city hall, along with a music band and procession, the Bulgarian authorities refused to register them. No viable reason was given, just excuses and trivial reasons. The couple's Macedonian identity was not well received by the Bulgarian authorities. Also, Sevda was a Canadian citizen from the other side of the iron curtain, which did not impress the Bulgarians.

Determined to be married, however, Sevda and Tashko took their case all the way up to Todor Zhifkov, the Bulgarian president. After hearing their case, the president approved of the marriage and gave them his blessing, especially after he found out Tashko's father was a Partisan. When Sevda and Tashko arrived at city hall, they were greeted with roses and live music, courtesy of the Bulgarian president. The couple ran into another snag as they tried to leave Bulgaria. Not being a Bulgarian citizen, Canada would not accept Tashko, even though he was married to a Canadian citizen. After months of legal wrangling and much running around, the Bulgarian Government made Tashko a Bulgarian citizen, which allowed him to proceed to the next step. The couple however, still could not leave. The British Embassy in Sofia, on Canada's behalf, would not grant Tashko a visa until someone from Canada sponsored him. Sevda wrote to her family and an application was quickly issued. When the visa arrived, Sevda was in the hospital recuperating from appendix surgery. It was her third day after her operation, but Sevda did not want to delay the departure and had her doctor release her on threats that she would sign herself out. Tashko and Sevda arrived in Toronto on February 17th, 1965 to complete the family reunion.

John (son of Mike and Christina)

John (Janko), son of Mike (Mihail) and Christina (Ristana) was born in the village of Oshchima - Lerinsko on November 19, 1934. John was the second of four siblings, the oldest being Sophie, and then John, followed by Peter and Lena.

Even though John was very young at the time, he remembers many details of his youth. John remembers one day well in the early spring of 1939, before the Second World War started, an episode that left a lasting impression on his life. One day he went visiting the home of his best friend Peter whose mother Stojanca Tsafovska asked the boys to go to Peter's aunt's to pick up some supplies and bring them back home. Several hours passed and when the boys did not return, Stojanca became anxious and sent her older son Naum to look for them. The boys had stopped for a visit at a friend's house and had lost all track of time. Just as John and Peter came out of Mirulka's house, there was Naum standing in front of them. Sensing they were in trouble, the boys bolted. Peter took the alleyway down towards the river and John ran toward the Kazanche, a coop of the village distillery. Naum chased John towards a bridge. Just before the bridge, John sensed that Naum had stopped running so he stopped and turned around to see. Naum began to tease John, taking threatening single steps towards him then stopping abruptly. With every step Naum took forward, John took steps back. John at this point was both nervous about being caught and angry with Naum's taunting. His distraction caused him to forget that he was standing on the bridge, which had no railings. As John took another step back, he fell off the edge of the bridge and into the very shallow water below. John landed face down and cut his face severely on the sharp rocks below. The fall left a wound the size of a dime on John's nose, which he plugged up with his finger to stop the bleeding. Naum, who himself must have been both terrified and guilt ridden, bolted from the scene not even bothering to check to see if John had survived the fall! Unfortunately, there was no doctor in the village so it was John's grandmother Kotejca who managed to patch him up as best she could. This was a very traumatic experience that John has not forgotten. He still carries the scar on his nose.

As did other children his age, John attended school. He was in grade one and remembers well when the schools closed due to the outbreak of the Greek-Italian War. From then on, life in Oshchima took a turn for the worse. The entire community suffered its effects and with the outbreak of the Second World War, life became desperate. When the Germans were making their final retreat, the village of Oshchima was empty. The villagers, together with their livestock, retreated into the forested mountains of Oshchima trying to escape from the German army.

John also remembers a day when German attack planes were in a dogfight with a British heavy bomber over Oshchima. Unfortunately, the British plane was shot down and crashed over Staro Oshchima just north of present day Oshchima. Dead British airmen were hanging from the trees. Many unexploded bombs were scattered around the crash site.

John's favorite childhood memories are from Katin Livage, where he spent his summers in the family summerhouse looking after their orchard. John spent many dark nights alone with only his dog Hitler for company. John dreaded the nights for fear of the blood curdling screeching sounds that haunted him night after night. It wasn't until he was much older that he came to know that the screeching sounds were that of nighthawks in the surrounding forests.

Like many other young Oshchimians, John at an early age was expected to work and help out all around the house and on the family homestead. Mike, John's father, joined the Partisans and left for Yugoslavia. John, being the eldest male in the family, took on the responsibility of running the homestead along with his older sister Sophie. This included tilling the soil, planting, harvesting, and looking after the livestock. No sooner was the World War over than the Greek Civil War began, bringing further hardship to the region and the people of Oshchima. John's father, Mike, left the safety of Yugoslavia to re-join the Partisans at home. Unfortunately, a difference of opinion with his commanding officer landed Mike in hot water. Mike insisted that too many young Partisans were being killed in action due to the inexperience of their commanding officers and spoke up against the practice of appointing young and inexperienced officers to command the troops. The Greek Partisans in command did not share Mike's opinion and charged him with treason and sentenced him to death. Faced with the death penalty, Mike had no alternative but to escape while under house arrest. Mike was caught, while attempting to make his getaway, by the government patrol and was taken to prison in Solun (Salonika) and later transferred to the

prison in Lerin to await trial. Mike's father Kote (Jimmy) was a British subject, being a Canadian Citizen since 1919. He had good connections and money and was able to arrange for Mike's release. Mike was released but had to agree to give up his Greek citizenship and leave the country immediately. As soon as Mike became a free man, he left for Canada where he joined his parents in Toronto.

While Mike was still in prison, one early February 1948 morning, the Greek Partisans came to the village and took Mike's family under house arrest and detained them in the village school. The Greek Partisans seized the family home and took everything. They emptied the grain storage, took all clothing, and every last piece of food. They proceeded to parade the livestock through the village for all to see. Their empty house would subsequently be turned into a hospital. Later that afternoon an armed escort took John's mother Christina, his 16-year old sister Sophie, and John himself to the village of Breznica. They traveled on foot through the deep snow and managed to reach the village of Rula where they spent the night. The next morning they continued traveling by foot until they reached Breznica. John's mother was immediately taken, interrogated at high command headquarters and then subsequently released. The three family members were free but had nowhere to go. They no longer had their own home. Christina took her children back to Oshchima to the home of her parents, Tanas and Sotira, where they lived with the support of many Oshchimians who did their utmost to provide what they could for John's family.

In the spring of 1948, the Partisans enacted the 'Save the Children Program'. Under this program, all children under the age of 14 were to be evacuated from the war torn regions of northwestern Macedonia and sent to live abroad in Eastern European block countries. Parents were reluctant to send their children to an unknown fate but had no choice but to comply. It was the most emotional time John's family had experienced. The first to leave were John's younger brother Peter and younger sister Lena. Together they traveled to Yugoslavia but were separated there. Peter was forced to continue to Romania and eventually Poland while Lena remained in Yugoslavia. The parents of these young children were 'assured' that the evacuation was a temporary measure and that the children would be returned within 6 months, after the fighting had settled. However, this program was in fact a well thought out plan by the Greeks to rid Macedonia of its youth, the majority of which never returned to see their homeland again. Within three months the civil war intensified. Under the care of surrogate mother Kita Keleshova, John left Oshchima with 33 other children who were taken over the Yugoslavian border to the village of Lubojno. He spent approximately three weeks in Lubojno without a change of clothing, dishes or cutlery. At the border the Greek Partisans took everyone's gear, promising that everything would be delivered to them by wagon upon their reaching Lubojno. This was their way of 'lessening' their burden as they traveled on foot. However, the delivery never arrived and the children were left without essentials. John remembers well going up and down the riverbanks in Lubojno searching for a tin can or anything that could be used as a bowl for his soup ration. He wasn't able to find anything and most of the time went without food.

After approximately three weeks in Lubojno, the children were loaded into trucks and taken to the train station in Bitola. They boarded the train destined for Hungary and after a short stopover in Skopje, they traveled another two days and three nights until they arrived in Budapest. There, they were welcomed by the Hungarian Red Cross at the railroad station and were transported to an ex-army dormitory called 'Lahtania'. The Hungarian Red Cross did their utmost to make all the children feel secure and happy by distributing toys and candies, things they had gone so long without. It was shortly after the World War had ended and there was still a huge shortage of food, especially bread. John remembers being served dinner by the Red Cross and how the bread was packaged in paper cartons and rationed quite strictly. He remembers how the older children would cut the lights in the dormitory and steal the bread, under the umbrella of darkness. On several occasions the most homesick children, believing they could find their way back home, would try to sneak out of the compound and hide under burned out armaments and vehicles around the perimeter of the dormitory. These young children had no concept of how far away from home they really were but were desperate to try to get back to their families.

After a short stay in Lahtania, the Oshchimians were the first to be transferred to a factory called Dohangiar, a tobacco company in the industrial part of Budapest-Ujpesht. During their stay there, one of our Oshchimian girls fell ill and was taken to hospital. John remembers visiting Sevda, in hospital, with

the other Oshchimians to try to encourage her to fight her disease and get better so that they could all be together again. Hospital staff stopped their visits, presumably due to the severity of the disease. The children knew that something was not right and soon learned that the Oshchimians had lost one of their own.

While at Dohangiar, they had the honor of being guests at a luncheon in downtown Budapest given by the president's wife, Mrs. Rakosi. She also donated sports dress for all the boys and girls. After approximately five months they were moved to a resort called Nogmagoch, for the school year 1948 – 1949, where they attended school full time for the first time since arriving in Hungary, learning Macedonian and Greek languages. Nogmagoch was the most beautiful resort. On the front of the building the globe was depicted. The globe was planted with red roses and with four statues placed symmetrically around the globe. The statues represented the four seasons of the year, each with a symbol of the season. The building itself was a beautiful palace. In the spring of 1949 John was moved back to Budapest to a dormitory called Zahariadis where he attended school. By September John was moved again to a dormitory in downtown Budapest called "Trpovski". From here, boys and girls were directed to different schools and factories in many cities to work and learn a trade. In the meantime a new group of boys and girls arrived at Trpovski, on their way to Poland. At that time, John made an official request to be allowed to leave Hungary for Poland in order to be reunited with his brother Peter. The request was granted and in September of 1949 John left Budapest for Poland, meeting his brother in "Londek Zdroj". In the spring of 1950 the two brothers split up again. John was transferred to "Zgozelec" in the dormitory called "Zahariadis" and then to "Ujazd" outside "Zgozelec" where he attended electrical school. John's brother Peter left for the city of Shcecin for a while and then to Warsaw, taking auto mechanics. In the year 1951, John was transferred to Wojanow where he finished a two-year school in electronics, as a radio mechanic. It was here, in 1952, that John received news that his mother Christina had died in Toronto, at age 38. Needless to say it was devastating news, shattering their hopes of seeing their mother alive again. In the 1952-53 school year, John was admitted to a 4 year Technikum-College, starting in grade two at "Technikum Mechaniczno-Radiotechnichne" in the town of "Dzierzoniow". In May of 1955 John graduated and received his certificate – Radio technician (Swiadectwo Dojzalosci) and was directed to work as a radio technician in the Polish radio "Radio Wroclaw" as a service technician at the transmitter site outside "Wroclaw". John's two sisters, Sophie and Lena, were in Yugoslavia until their departure for Canada 3 days before their mother died. On September 27th, 1955 John and Peter arrived in Toronto and were re-united with the rest of the family.

A few years after arriving in Canada, John met Cena, through a school friend, at a St. Kiril church dance and on January 27th, 1957, John and Cena were married. Cena arrived in Canada, from Poland, in May of 1955. Cena was born on January 7th, 1937 in the village of Visheni, Kostursko, Macedonia, the daughter of Giorgi and Gitcha Stojchevi. John and Cena (Zena) have three children, all born in Toronto, Canada. Christina was born on June 29th, 1959, Mitchell (Mike) was born on May 22nd, 1961, and Caroline was born on August 10th, 1965. John and Cena have six beautiful grandchildren.

Since their arrival in 1955, John and Cena have lived in Toronto and have been active participants in the local Macedonian community. Shortly after his arrival in Canada John joined the United Macedonians Committee of Canada. In 1964 he served as Secretary Treasurer and then later that same year, was elected President of the United Macedonians Committee of Canada for the year 1965; the year the United Macedonians had its biggest ever Ilinden Picnic, held at Spring Hill Park, Whitby, Ontario. Since then, John served in many positions on the Executive Board of the organization. John was a co-founder of the United Macedonians of North America. At the first United Macedonians convention, held on September 3-7, 1970, John was elected President of the Joint Executive Board of the United Macedonians of North America. John was also one of the founders of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, St. Clement of Ohrid, in Toronto. John was elected to the Board of Directors in 1963 and he remained on the Board of Directors, during and after the construction of the church (1963 – 1965). In September of 1965, John was re-elected to the Board and served as Secretary Treasurer of the church in 1966, under the Presidency of Professor James Zugloff. John continues to be active in the church and has served on many boards. In 1980, John was elected President of St. Clement of Ohrid church for the years 1981-1982. Two

years later, at the American Canadian Orthodox Diocese Convocation in Gary, Indiana, in September of 1983, John was elected vice-president of the diocese for the years 1984 – 1985. John has also been an active supporter and member of Benefit Society of Oshchima.

Sofia (daughter of Kata and Vlcho)

Sofia, daughter of Kata and Vlcho was born in the village Zhelevo on August 15th, 1926 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada.

Sofia came to live in Oshchima at age three and a half as a result of her father's death and her mother's marriage to Florin Mirchev from Oshchima. To protect the young girl's future, Sofia's last name was changed from Nikolovski to Mirchevski, thus assuming her mother's new married name. Her brother Kole, born December 4th, 1924, drifted between Zhelevo and Oshchima while Sofia was joined by two stepbrothers named Kole and Lambro.

Sofia completed grade six in the Oshchima public school and afterwards helped her mother look after her baby sister Fana, did housework, and tended the fields. In addition to several fields, the Mirchev family also owned a variety store, which was managed by Kole while Lambro managed the fields and tended the livestock. With the properties and the house well looked after, Florin was free to seek migrant employment (pechelbarstvo) and left for Canada in 1938.

Life was typical for Sofia until 1941 when Kole and Lambro decided to move out of the Mirchev household to pursue lives of their own. Without the men, Kata, Sofia, and young Fana were left alone to fend for themselves. Being the most able bodied all responsibilities now fell on Sofia's shoulders. In addition to housework, Sofia had to do the tilling, planting, and harvesting of the fields, cutting and transporting the wood, harvesting hay from the meadows, and all other chores usually reserved for men. Sofia had one passion in life, to ride her horse (another activity reserved for men) for which she was frequently criticized by her mother. In spite of all criticisms however, Sofia, in the absence of her mother, continued to ride her horse (like a man, instead of like a woman with both legs to one side). As fate would have it, one time she accidentally came across her mother and to avoid being seen she hurriedly tried to dismount. Unfortunately, her foot got caught in the stirrup and she fell face first. She still has the scars to prove it. Startled, the horse bolted leaving Sofia on the ground with bleeding cuts to her face. Her mother ran to her aid and soon after the horse came back and Sofia was rescued. The horse was later confiscated by the German military soon after the invasion. Sofia was sad to see it go.

Life became even more difficult after the Italian and later the German invasions. Livestock and food were frequently confiscated and a certain amount of labour was demanded from each household. Sofia recalls one time when she was tilling the soil and her plough (ralo) caught on a thick root and broke. Without a plough she was in serious trouble. If she quit ploughing she would commit her family to starvation. Sofia wished there was some way that she could escape her harsh life, hoping that a door would open to a different world and she could walk away.

From bad, life suddenly took a turn for the worse with the start of the Greek civil war. With her stepfather stranded in Canada, her brother drafted by the Greek Royal military, and her stepbrothers drafted by the Partisans she was now truly alone. Unfortunately, when things seemed bleak they became worse when the Partisans drafted Sofia herself. Who was going to look after Kata, young Fana, and baby brother Vasil (born August 1934)? Sofia was comforted by the fact that Fana was a capable girl and loved her mother very much, as long as they were together they would be all right.

It was 1947 when Sofia was drafted along with 300 other young women and taken to German, Prespa for military training. Sofia spent three months in training before she found out that her draft was a mistake. One day during a military cleanup exercise, when the women were taken to Rula near central command, Sofia was encouraged to appeal her draft, on the grounds that two of her siblings were already drafted. During the early stages of the civil war the Partisans operated in accordance with set rules, especially regarding the number of family members simultaneously drafted. Sofia's appeal was heard and she was discharged.

There was another unfortunate episode in Sofia's life that took place during the burning of the Oshchima barns. The investigators were pointing fingers at the Partisans but Sofia knew that the perpetrators were not Partisans because they were wearing badges on their hats. She saw a badge as it reflected the light of the flare, the night the barns were burned. But because of her remark in public, Sofia was dragged through a number of unpleasant investigations and frightening inquiries.

Unfortunately, as the war progressed it reached a desperate stage and the Partisans again called Sofia to duty. It was January 1948 when she was sent for childcare training to Zhelevo, the town where she was born. After two months of training, Sofia was transferred to Nivitsi, Prespa to begin receiving the refugee children. Her initial task was to round up lost and orphaned children. Later she was to receive and prepare children for the exodus. Sofia recalls it was March 1st, 1948 when she was first transferred to Nivitsi and left for Hungary on April 30th of the same year.

When all the children from the villages arrived they were organized into small groups and one by one sent on a trek out of the country. After reaching Rumbi, for their safety, the groups were diverted from the main paths and escorted over the mountains. Much of the terrain was rough and difficult to traverse, and the fear of being discovered made the situation even more tense. The guides were constantly yelling at the mothers to keep the children moving and quiet.

At one point the group came across a dangerously steep slope. Sofia recalls the slope was full of loose rocks and led directly into the rushing waters of a river. It was too dangerous for the children to cross alone so each mother had to make several trips to carry the children on their shoulders one at a time. The slope was out in the open, exposed to aerial view and expediency was in order. Sofia was lucky that day as a tragedy was narrowly averted. In her haste to get across, Sofia tripped over a thorn bush and lost her balance. As she stumbled she managed to take the child off her shoulders and toss her up the slope. Luckily, the girl didn't panic and was able to brace herself. Sofia then grabbed the child's feet and regained her own balance. It was a frightening experience for everyone.

After spending a short time in Yugoslavia, the children were loaded on trains and sent to various Eastern European countries. Sofia's group, consisting of about 2,000 children (35 from Oshchima), was sent to Hungary. During her trip, Sofia found out that her sister Fana (born July 9th, 1931) had left home and was among the refugee children but it wasn't until later that the siblings met in person. Sofia was happy to see her sister and at the same time was worried about the wellbeing of her mother.

After reaching Hungary, the children gathered together in a military barracks in Budapest. There each child was undressed, sprayed with pesticide, bathed, dressed in new clothing, and given a package of toiletries that included a tube of toothpaste. The children, not knowing what the toothpaste was, mistook it for food. The aroma of mint reminded them of candy and many wasted the toothpaste, attempting to eat it. Initially, Greek and Macedonian children were mixed together in a single group. But due to outbreaks of fights, the authorities were forced to split the children into smaller groups, segregated by village of origin. The Oshchimian children and Sofia were grouped together with the children from Nivitsi and Besfina.

After spending three weeks in quarantine the groups of children were adopted by the Hungarian community. Each village community supported by a factory complex adopted a group. Fortunately Sofia's group was taken by one of the richest communities in the region and her children were privileged to live in quarters made of marble. Nearby there was a small lake teeming with exotic and colourful fish. Unfortunately, the children were all homesick missing their mothers and had little appreciation for luxury. Slowly, however, routine began to take over as the children attended school and became involved in school activities. Besides the regular curriculum, the refugee children were expected to learn to read and write in their native language. Even though Greek officials administered the programs and scoffed at the idea, the Macedonian children were given the choice of learning Macedonian.

There were a total of 300 children in Sofia's camp attending grades six to eight, males and females mixed together. The dormitory, however, was a Catholic nunnery and the genders ate and slept in separate quarters.

In August 1948, Sofia and 120 other immigrant women were sent to Romania for two months of training to upgrade their teaching skills.

As the civil war back home drew to an end, Sofia, through the Red Cross, found out that her mother was well. She had emigrated to Toronto, Canada in 1950 where she joined her husband Florin. From her Greek boss and school administrator, on the last day of school, Sofia also found out that her mother was looking for her. Kata had sent a message via the Red Cross wanting both of her daughters to join her in Canada. After sharing the news with Fana, the sisters decided to go, the urge being too strong to resist. This, however, was not good news for the Greek administration and as a result Sofia was fired from her teaching job. After this, Sofia was unable to find employment anywhere.

Without a job, Sofia could not pay her bills and resorted to moving in with Kita Keleshova, another surrogate mother from Oshchima. Kita's place was small and had no spare bed. Thanks to Oshchimian ingenuity, however, Pandoitsa, another Oshchimian woman, came to the rescue. Pandoitsa found a large burlap bag, filled it with hay and gave it to Sofia to use as a mattress.

Her desire to cross the iron curtain landed Sofia in more trouble than she anticipated when she discovered that she couldn't even purchase items from the stores. The local shops refused to sell her yarn. She had hoped that, being unable to support herself in any other way, she could resort to knitting gloves and sell them in the market. But as she discovered, she couldn't even do that. Thanks to Kita's mother however, who regularly purchased yarn for herself, yarn was also procured for Sofia.

Fana shared a similar fate as Sofia. After finding out that she accepted the offer to leave Hungary for Canada, Fana in 1955 was kicked out of nursing school and she too ended up living with Kita.

Finally the day came when Sofia and Fana were cleared to leave Hungary. They landed in Montreal on January 18th, 1955. When the doors of the plane opened, no one was allowed to leave. On the tarmac, music was playing and people were waving flags as the airplane's captain announced on the P.A. system that the first Greek children from behind the iron curtain had arrived. Sofia and Fana looked around and concluded that they must be mistaken, there were no Greek children on the airplane. It was not until a Greek voice came over the P.A. asking anyone who spoke Greek to step forward, that the sisters realized they were talking about them. As they descended to the tarmac the media were taking pictures. To this day, Sofia still has the newspaper articles and photographs written about them and treasures them in a frame hanging in her home.

The reception in Toronto was even grander, hailed as an historic moment of being the first refugee children to cross the iron curtain. This was also a triumphant event for the Red Cross, for its crowning achievement of rejoining war torn families from the Greek Civil War.

No sooner had she landed in Canada than, according to her mother, being the eldest daughter and in the Macedonian tradition, Sofia's priority was to quickly find a husband. She was twenty-nine years old when Sofia met George, a Hungarian man, whose culture and language she understood well. George was born on November 21st, 1925 and left Hungary for France in 1946 and from there emigrated to Canada in 1954. George married Sofia on January 28th, 1956. A couple of years later, on September 6th, 1958 their son Nick was born. The family followed Hungarian culture at home and brought up Nick in the Hungarian tradition but Sofia remained a Macedonian from Oshchima all her life.

Fana, Sofia's sister, in spite of promising Sofia she would marry a Macedonian boy, on May 1956, married Zoltan a Hungarian boy. Fana and Zoltan have three children, Leslie born June 22nd, 1958, John born January 9th, 1961, and Julie born August 5th, 1967, all born in Toronto.

Vasil, Sofia's youngest brother, left Oshchima in 1947 with the refugee children and ended up in Poland where he remained until 1955. Vasil arrived in Canada in September 1955 where he later met and married Yanna from Kostursko. Vasil and Yanna have two daughters, Kathy and Dorothy, both born in Toronto. Vasil passed away on April 23rd, 1999.

Lambro (son of Risto and Anastasia)

Lambro, son of Risto and Anastasia Kozarov was born in the village Oshchima on October 23rd, 1922 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada. As a young boy Lambro completed grade six in public school in Oshchima then went to work on the family farm on a full time basis. Risto Kozarov's family was poor and everyone, including Lambro even during his school years, had to work hard in order to

survive. Lambro's father Risto was a pechalbar who traveled many places in search of work. On three separate occasions he traveled to Canada. While working in Canada he joined Benefit Society Oshchima and served as treasurer. He made regular contributions to the emergency travel fund set up to help pay the fare for Oshchimians who became ill or destitute and wanted to go home. When Lambro was born, his father was in Canada trying to earn a living. Even with the earnings from abroad, Risto's family was still poor. The fields they owned hardly provided enough to sustain them. From youth Lambro had done every job conceivable, even the jobs nobody else wanted. During lonely times Lambro had his flute (kaval) to keep him company. Even as a youngster he had a passion for music and was able to play melodies simply by listening to them. By age sixteen he began to play the clarinet and joined local bands. By age nineteen Lambro (clarinet) joined with Pando Stefov (trumpet), Pando Kozarov (trombone), German Tanevski (trombone), and young Vasil Kozarov (snare drums) to form their own band. From time to time they contracted drummers like Ilo Kozarov and became very popular in Oshchima. They played mostly for fun, the love of music, and for enjoyment. They were very popular with young and old and played traditional Macedonian songs providing people with entertainment and culture. There was no television, radio or any form of electronic entertainment in those days; only live music which Oshchimians enjoyed to the fullest.

Contracts from playing at festivals, weddings, and other events were a welcome supplement to Lambro's income. In addition to working at home and playing in the band, Lambro also got a job at a blacksmith shop (kovach) in Prespa. From 1941 to 1947 Lambro, with fellow Oshchimian Kosta Argirov, made daily treks to Prespa to work and earn a living. Money was scarce in those days and services were paid for with grain.

In 1943, at age twenty-one Lambro met and married Anastasia (Tasa) from Zhelevo. Tasa, daughter of Spiro and Zvezda was born in Zhelevo on December 22nd, 1922. Tasa completed grade six and began working full time at home and on the family farm. As a young girl, Tasa learned to knit and crochet, making her own wardrobe and dowry. Tasa was a shy girl and wanted a simple wedding ceremony but Lambro spared no expense and gave her a traditional Macedonian wedding. The wedding took place on December 25th, 1943 after which Tasa moved to Oshchima to live with Lambro's family. A year later they were blessed with their first child Sofia, who was born on September 24th, 1944. During the occupation Lambro and Tasa, along with the rest of the Kozarov family, maintained a low profile and stayed out of harms way. After the occupation on September 4th, 1947, Lambro and Tasa's second daughter Sevda was born. By now the Greek civil war was brewing and the Partisans drafted him to serve in their music bands. Unfortunately Lambro developed an abdominal hernia and after serving for about a month and a half, in May and June of 1947, he was released. Due to the conflict and the dangers it created for travelers, Lambro gave up his job in Prespa and went to work in Zhelevo as a blacksmith This lasted a couple of years when once again the Partisans drafted him, this time for combat duty. Fortunately before his training was completed the war ended and Lambro was released. He complained to one of the field physicians in the camps about the pain from his hernia and was released a short time before the war ended. Instead of being sent home to recuperate, Lambro was sent to the camps in Albania to wait for new orders. When the war was over Lambro became a refugee and along with many other Macedonians was sent to Tashkent in the Soviet Union.

After the Partisans took Lambro in 1949, Tasa remained at home. For the most part between 1947 and 1949 Tasa, because she was a mother of a child younger than two years old, was immune from being drafted by the Partisans. She was, however, responsible for providing manual labour as required. At that time her daughter Sevda was very ill and Tasa could not leave her alone so she often asked her mother-in-law to be her substitute for duties to the Partisans. Tasa and her mother-in-law got along very well and had a mutual respect and admiration for each other. Tasa's mother-in-law unfortunately had limited use of one leg and walked with a limp. Because of her condition, most of the time she was assigned to light duties such as delivering food and water to the workers.

Sofia was three years old when the Partisans came calling for the evacuation to save the children. With tears in her eyes and sorrow in her heart, Tasa prepared her daughter and sent her off. Sofia, however, did not like the idea of being separated from her mother and by the time the group got to Preol

she went missing. She was miles away from home and too young to take care of herself but luckily made it home safely. After that Tasa had a long talk with her and left her in the personal care of surrogate mother Fania Petkovska from Oshchima. Sofia became a refugee child and eventually ended up in Czechoslovakia.

During the fall of 1949 when Oshchima was being evacuated Tasa could not leave because Sevda was ill. She wanted to leave but where could she go with a sick child? Each day she hesitated the situation worsened until one day a bomb fell in her yard killing her calf and smashing her horse's saddle. The experience shocked her and she packed and was ready to leave the next morning. Unfortunately, by dawn the Greek army was in the village and it was no longer safe to leave the house. Soon after all Oshchimians remaining in the village, including Tasa and Sevda, were rounded up and relocated to Zhelevo where they spent the winter of 1949 and the spring and summer of 1950 before they were allowed to return home. Left alone to fend for herself, Tasa found life very difficult. She worked the fields by herself planting and harvesting potatoes, beans, and corn struggling to make a meager living.

After arriving in Russia, Lambro's first priority was to reunite his family. He was desperately needed back home but politics made it difficult to return. The next best thing he could do was retrieve his daughter Sofia from Czechoslovakia and bring her to live with him in Tashkent. While in Russia, Lambro worked for a year then joined the conservatory of music. There he spent four years learning to read and write music and play musical instruments. He loved music and learned to play several wind instruments, his favourite always being the clarinet. Tasa in the meantime continued her struggle to repatriate her family. By 1958 she had a breakthrough and by 1959 her family was together again. Lambro and Sofia were allowed to return home.

The war years devastated the population of Oshchima and life became even harder for the Kozarov family. In addition to the daily toil in the fields trying to earn a meager living, morale was low. The streets were silent as only a few people were left.

By now Sofia was nearing marrying age and caught the eye of a Zhelevo man named Kole. He had come from Canada on vacation. Soon after they met, Kole and Sofia were married and in 1961 Sofia left for Canada to join her husband. Sofia had experienced hardship first hand and knew that life in Oshchima would be harsh for her family, especially for her youngest sister Dafina who was just one year old when she left. Dafina was born on February 4th, 1960 a year after the families' reunion.

From the moment she arrived in Canada, Sofia made every effort to give her family a better life. Two years later, on July 3rd, 1963 Lambro arrived in Canada to join his daughter. Six months later Tasa, Sevda, and Dafina left their ancestral home for the last time and the whole family was once again reunited in their new home in Toronto, where they live to this day.

Krsto (son of Iovan and Tsveta)

Krsto, son of Iovan and Tsveta was born in the village Oshchima on September 28th, 1935 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada. Krsto attended grade school in Oshchima up to grade four. His education was interrupted in 1948 by the Partisan sponsored refugee children evacuation program. Krsto was too young to remember much detail about his life in the village but was able to recall a few memories. He remembers the Greek-Italian conflict of 1940 and old men discussing the war and who was going to win. He also remembers the beauty of Oshchima's vineyards, the variety of grapes, and his fondness for their taste. Krsto lived with his mother and eighty-year-old grandfather in the Popov house, next to the stream Trapo, sandwiched between the cliff Rit and the Keleshov clan. The house was shared with Mito's (Krsto's oldest brother's) family. Besides his aging grandfather, Krsto was the man of the house. Krsto's father was a pechalbar stranded in Canada, his middle brother Giorgi was a prisoner in the Greek concentration camps, and his oldest brother was a soldier fighting the Italians in Albania. Krsto being the eldest male living at home assumed responsibility for most chores around the house and on the farm. Being of such a young age Krsto found life hard. He recalls collecting wood for cooking and winter heating, harvesting grain and hay, sheep and cow herding, and many other chores that were usually

reserved for grown men. He remembers receiving help from older boys in his neighbourhood, like Nikola Stefou, who gave him tips on cow herding and protected him from the bullies from other neighbourhoods. Krsto also remembers the pestilence of grasshoppers descending from the sky in dark clouds and eating everything in their path. He remembers the old men shaking their heads at the sight and muttering words, predictions of disaster.

After the expulsion of the Italian and German occupation, life in the region seemed to be returning to normal. But as it turned out normal life was a short-lived illusion. The same liberation forces that expelled the occupiers, now vying for control of the country, turned on each other and escalated the conflict into a civil war. The Partisan force, half of which consisted of Macedonian fighters led by Greek commanders, pitted against the Greek Royal Army brought the conflict northward as it intensified. The Greek army in possession of bombers, fighter planes, and tanks pushed the lightly armed Partisans into the mountains of Vicho and Gramos. Many Macedonian villages, suspected of harbouring Partisans, became targets of the Greek bombers. The situation placed the civilian population in peril; especially the children and evacuation plans were contemplated. Krsto remembers the day the Partisans came to Oshchima and met with residents in the school to discuss evacuation plans for the children. The Partisans explained the rationale of the program and reassured mothers that it was temporary, three to four months until the danger passed before the children would be back home. Next came the evacuation. Residents were encouraged to voluntarily bring their children ages four to fourteen to the Village Square (stret selo). Mothers quickly prepared luggage, with a change of clothing and bags (torbi) of food and utensils before escorting their young ones to the gathering place. By the afternoon of this day, March 25th, 1948, Oshchima was emptied of its young. With eyes tearing mothers returned home from escorting their children into the hands of destiny. The cries of children, for their mothers, could be heard in the distance as they walked uphill towards Preol for Prespa. They walked behind their surrogate mothers holding hands, the older children comforting the young as they crossed over Preol into Prespa. They arrived in Strkovo and spent the rest of the day there. Under cover of darkness the children silently slipped by Rabi across the Yugoslav border and into Dupeni. From there they were moved to Luboino to wait for more arrivals from Kostour and other regions. Krsto and other Oshchimian children, in the care of mother Sevda Popovska, spent three days in Luboino in a small room on the lower level of a house, sleeping on a straw floor before they were loaded on trucks and shipped to Bitola. After two hours of waiting at the Bitola train station they were loaded on a train and sent to Brailovo. Food was in short supply. The hungry children, lonesome for their mothers and irritated by the constant bites of fleas cried themselves to sleep. After a week's stay at Brailovo, the children were loaded on a train and sent to Skopie. They arrived in Skopie on April 8th, 1948 and spent two days in the train station. While waiting, Krsto remembers meeting Simo Keleshov, another Oshchimian, who came to the train station looking for his children. Simo took his children and left. A while later, to everyone's surprise the cars began to roll. At that time the Oshchimian children and mothers were spread out in three cars. While the children were playing the mothers got together for a chat. Unbeknownst to them the cars were separated and now heading for different destinations. Krsto and others went to Romania, the mothers and some children went to Czechoslovakia, and the rest were sent to Bela Tsrkva, deeper into Yugoslavia. Krsto arrived in Kalimeneshti, Romania, April 11th. About one thousand five hundred children were offloaded and sent straight to the baths. Their flea-ridden clothes were washed in boiling water. After the bath, each child was issued under garments and pajamas and sent to a nearby compound, formerly used by the Germans as a hospital during the war. The children stayed there from April until October 1948. Then on October 25th, 1948 the children were moved to Poland. Before the trip, Krsto remembers trying on his old clothes but they would not fit. Most of the garments brought from home were woolen and shrank during the hot wash. Children were left without clothes. Fortunately, replacement garments were donated and given to them before leaving for Poland. After spending six months in Romania in a quasi-supervised compound and without any schooling, the children became wild and undisciplined. With one supervisor for the entire train, the trip to Poland was a joyride. Krsto remembers mischievously climbing through the window of a car to the roof of the moving train. To this day Krsto cringes at the thought and the danger in which he put himself. After the climb, Krsto and pals Alexander and Vasil stood upright and pretended to fly as the

train sped to its destination. When the train approached a tunnel the trio lay flat on their stomachs. Enveloped in billowing smoke from the steam engine, their faces blackened beyond recognition. When they crossed into Poland the train was taken over by a Polish crew. A supervisor, trained to deal with children was assigned to each car to deal with the rowdiness. For the rest of the trip, the children were well fed and rewarded with chocolates and apples for good behavior. When they arrived in Poland at the city of Londek Zdrui, the children were placed under Greek supervision, grouped by age and assigned to various school dormitories. Children of unknown age were grouped by size. Initially the children refused to cooperate. They distrusted the administrators and feared being separated from each other as had previously happened in Skopie. It took Red Cross intervention and much re-assurance to convince them to cooperate. Unlike the compound in Romania, the dorms in Poland were well staffed with one director and two or three assistants per dorm. Each dorm had eight to ten rooms with four children per room. There was no shortage of food, toys or games. The directors were responsible for supervising morning exercises, breakfast, and getting the children to school on time. After school they made sure the children came back safely, were given supper and put to bed. Krsto was placed in grade four and after spending a year at the dorms of Londek Zdrui he was relocated to Sgozelets, in October 1949, to attend regular school. The older children were enrolled in a two-year trade program. In August 1951, graduates from regular school were offered a four year technical program in mechanical, electrical or textile technologies. Upon successful completion, each graduate was guaranteed a job. Krsto chose to enroll and successfully completed the mechanical technology course. Instead of going off to a job, however, he applied and successfully passed the entrance exams to the Institute Polytechnic. But before he was able to start classes he left for Canada. For years Krsto had wanted to be with his father but global politics made it difficult. With the help of the Red Cross and its repatriation program, Krsto left Poland on September 25th, 1955 to join his family in Toronto.

Krsto's father Iovan came to Canada in 1937 as a pechalbar and had mixed feelings about returning home. The fact that there was a war going on and that the Greek Government had abandoned him made it much more difficult to return. After the partition of Macedonia in 1912 and 1913, Greece began to enlist Macedonians into the ranks of its military. Iovan was drafted prior to the 1922 Asian campaign and ended up fighting for the Greeks in Turkey. Unfortunately, he was captured and remained a prisoner of war for six years, unbeknownst to the village and his family who assumed he was dead, missing in action. Six years later on Easter Iovan came home. He was penniless and in tatters, thrown out of prison literally naked. He had to fashion himself a garment made from discarded burlap in order to travel. Being a non-Greek he received absolutely no benefits from the Greek Government. Iovan was poor, his land and farm could not produce enough to sustain his growing family so he was forced to seek work elsewhere. Canada was a popular choice for fortune seekers especially if they had relatives living there who could assist them in finding work. Iovan was lucky that his wife's brothers were living in Canada. They came to Canada during the Turkish era before 1912 and were well established.

Happy to be in Canada, Krsto got a job in a restaurant and did some traveling that included trips to the Macedonian community in Mansfield, Ohio. While there, at a dance in 1963, he caught the eye of a young lady name Lena. After several more trips to Ohio, Krsto proposed to Lena and they became engaged. On April 4th, 1964 they married and Lena moved to Toronto to live with Krsto.

Lena, daughter of Tanas and Anastasia from Orovnik, and granddaughter of the famous Prespan Tanas, was born on August 10th, 1944 in the village of Orovnik, Prespa. Lena left Orovnik in March of 1948 with her aunt as a refugee and was too young to remember anything about her life there. Her aunt, in later life, told her about her village Orovnik and how life was there. Her trek for the next twelve years took Lena to Romania and Poland where she spent most of her time attending school. Then in 1962 it was made possible for Lena to leave Poland and join her father and sister in Mansfield Ohio, USA. After working for two years in a factory, Lena left Mansfield for Toronto to live with her husband Krsto.

Lena and Krsto have two children, John (Iovan), born on March 1st, 1966 and Elizabeth (Tsveta), born on January 19, 1969, both born in Toronto, Canada.

Krsto and Lena are both active in the Macedonian community in Toronto. Krsto is an active participant in the organization Benefit Society Oshchima while Lena is an active participant in the Macedonian

churches, retirement home, and Oshchimian events. Krsto and Lena's children were brought up in the Oshchimian tradition by Baba Tsveta and Dedo Iovan.

Ristana (daughter of Krsto and Petra)

Ristana Minovska daughter of Krsto and Petra was born in Oshchima on December 18th, 1930. As a child, Ristana lived at the Ioanovski house and spent most of her time working on the farm, helping out with family chores and learning to knit and crochet. Ristana completed grade three before the Greek-Italian conflict commenced and forced schools to close. With her grandfather's help Ristana learned how to read and write and also became good at arithmetic. She was sixteen when her writing skills almost got her into trouble. The incident took place one night when Ristana's feet were aching from walking barefoot and needed attention. Her grandmother put together a potion and used it on her feet to soothe the pain. This went on well through the night. Every time she cried with pain her grandmother came running. In the meantime, Greek police patrols (bourandari) watching the houses, looking for Partisans, saw the light (kandilo) moving from room to room in the dark. Without hesitation they surrounded the house and forcibly went in, demanding to know where the Partisans were. When Ristana's grandmother explained that there were no Partisans in the house, the police demanded to know why there was light moving from room to room. Ristana's grandmother explained the situation to them but they still did not believe her. Even after she took them to see Ristana with bandages on her feet, they still had doubts and searched the house and found a letter they considered suspect. On one side the letter was addressed to an uncle living locally and on the other to an uncle (Stoian) living in Bitola. Young Ristana had been practicing letter writing and had composed a pretend letter to her uncles. This was explained to the police but they were not convinced and demanded to know who was the person living in Bitola and why was this letter written to him. Ristana, her letter, and others in the house were dragged out in the middle of the night and taken to the Moushov house where the police conferred with an unknown person. Ristana and the others were later released unharmed.

As the Partisan movement gained momentum, both sides of the conflict were drafting able Oshchimians. By 1946 the Partisans had drafted most of Ristana's family. The Greek patrols in the area became vigilant, constantly looking for Partisans and for people aiding them. Fearing for her life, one day in 1946 Ristana and her uncle Paso left Oshchima for the safety of Mount Moro. After that episode Ristana joined the Partisan youth core. Along with others her age she was responsible for guarding Oshchima and transporting courier messages between command posts.

Ristana could have gone with the refugee children but her concern for her grandmother kept her home. But as luck would have it, the Partisans drafted her and she was sent to the village of Papli to work in the fields. About a year later in July 1948, Ristana was transferred to a military support unit to transport supplies and work in the fields. Using donkeys and mules she and several other women were responsible for picking up and dropping off grain between villages, in Partisan held territories. The group was also responsible for harvesting crops when required. This lasted for several months until the winter of 1948 when Ristana was transferred to the military training camp in Roudari where she spent December and January training in combat tactics and in the use of weapons. She was then sent to Trnaa for more training and re-assignment in preparation for the assault on Lerin.

In February 1949, trained troops in good spirits and dressed in white capes were ready to fight. This was Ristana's first battle. She was anxious and thinking about freeing the captives in the Lerin prison camp. If only this battle took place a couple of years earlier she could have freed her father and uncles. Now they were in the Greek islands suffering humiliation, hunger, and beatings.

After arriving at Psoderi near the battleground, instead of engaging the enemy the Partisans were told to hold their position. The delay cost them three days. Unprepared, many endured the cold and slept in the snow in makeshift tents. After the third day, Ristana's unit was ordered to take defensive positions at Trsianski Kalivi to prevent the Greek Army from mounting an attack from the rear. Finally the order was given and the offensive on Lerin began but it did not unfold as planned. The Greek Army anticipated

every move and countered them with stiff resistance. The Partisans were no match for the well-trained, battle-hardened army. The battle lasted all night and as dawn broke it revealed the invisible horror. The snow-white terrain was painted red with the blood of the dead and wounded. It was a terrifying sight to see, especially for inexperienced fighters like Ristana. She could not comprehend the loss of so many lives; of the young, beautiful men and women sent to the grave. Out of four hundred, only forty were left in Ristana's unit. The rest were dead or wounded. The survivors were re-grouped and re-assigned. Ristana was assigned to the field medics where she encountered her aunt, Rina Bogleva, and Sevda Malkova from Oshchima. Running a gauntlet of machinegun fire, mortar fire, and aerial attacks, Ristana carried the wounded and dead from the battlegrounds to the field hospitals. During the battle for Lerin many were killed instantly while others were wounded and froze to death. With all the planning, organizing, training, and preparing that went on, how could this have happened? Many questions few answers. Ristana believes the Partisan leadership may have been responsible. For example, before the assault on Lerin a Partisan surrendered to the Greeks and could have given them information about the assault. Then, there was that three-day delay between the planned and actual assault. Could this have had anything to do with the Greek Army waiting for reinforcements? Some claim that the attack was held back to give the reinforcements time to arrive. Were these events a coincidence, conspiracy or plain incompetence by the leadership? Ristana was not given a satisfactory explanation. Also, it was observed that the dead were found foaming at the mouth, a symptom of nerve gas poisoning, which some allege the Greeks used during the battle.

After the field medic assignment, Ristana, cold, frightened, and hungry was re-issued her old machine gun and ordered to report to Kolomnati for re-assignment. Her voyage took her to Bigla, Psodery, Trsie, Statitsa, and finally Kolomnati. There, after some re-training, she was assigned to a guard patrol responsible for guarding strategic points in the local mountains. This lasted about three weeks before she was sent to Trnaa to prepare for an assault on the village Sourovitch. It was April 1949, and Ristana hoped to go home for Easter but was shipped out before she had a chance. Before leaving, however, Ristana and her old friend Leftera Stefou were visited by Leftera's mother and youngest brother Alexander. They brought them news from home and gave them zelnik and other goodies for Easter. To celebrate the Easter holiday, Ristana recalls that each Partisan was issued a small piece of zelnik and half an egg, which was all they could afford. Ristana celebrated Easter at Mount Malimadi and shared her egg with her friend Leftera.

Not long after Ristana's departure, orders were given to carry out the assault and capture Sourovitch. It was well known that the neighbouring village Exisou harboured Greek patrols (Bourandari) so Ristana's unit was left behind to guard against a rear ambush. Ristana recalls wearing a black cape, lying flat on her stomach in the snow with her support mounted machinegun pointing towards Exisou when the mortars began to fall. The Greek forces (Bourandari) were hitting hard from everywhere and within a few minutes most of her unit was decimated. Ristana was lucky to have escaped with her life. A mortar killed two people next to her, a nurse included. Recalling this episode in her life, Ristana remembered another sad experience previous to becoming a Partisan. It was a different battle in a different place and time. A young woman was badly wounded and Ristana had to take her to the hospital. She was transported on the back of a mule but the hospital was far and the woman never reached it alive. She died riding the mule with her head slumped over and her long hair hanging down, bathed in blood. It was a sad sight and haunts Ristana to this day.

After the unsuccessful attempt to capture Sourovitch, orders were given to report to the command centre in Trnaa. Once again Ristana came close to home but could not visit her family. Soon she was shipped out and sent to guard various strategic points in the Partisan held areas. Ristana was guard by night and housekeeper by day. Women with sewing skills, which included almost everyone, were responsible for mending uniforms and laundry duty. Ristana recalls making shirt collars from shirttails to keep the necks of those wearing them warm. Women also took turns washing the camp's clothes in nearby rivers. One time she was promised time off from guard duty if she helped out with the laundry, but her unit was ordered out and she had no choice but to go. Her uniform was wet so she wore regular clothing and some garments that were partially dried. It was cold that night especially with wet clothing. As luck would have

it, her camp was ambushed that night and Ristana lost all her clothing, including her camping gear and parka. The next night she was on guard duty she nearly froze to death. She recalls being helped up because her legs were frozen and had lost all feeling. For support, Ristana grabbed the tail of a pack mule and walked behind it for what seemed like an eternity before she recovered. Her frozen journey took her from Bel Kamen to Vitcho. Unprepared for the mountain climate, Ristana, like many others, experienced hardship and illness from the cold. Those who lost their gear and supplies remained cold and hungry for a long time. When they passed by Kolomnati, Ristana was given some plain bread to ease her hunger, but after chewing and chewing she was only able to swallow a little due to the pain in her throat. Ristana was weak, sick, and had sore and swollen feet from the cold. The next day during exercise she collapsed from exhaustion.

The winter was difficult but it was finally over. After her recovery, Ristana was sent to Malimadi on various work details including gathering food and digging bunkers for the Partisans. She remembers one tragic day when she, along with a few others, went cherry picking. It was a beautiful summer day in early July and everything was perfect. They had picked six bushels of cherries and were happy with their harvest. As they were heading back to camp, they spotted another beautiful cherry tree loaded with delicious fruit. One of the men in the group decided to investigate further. Ristana became uneasy and tried to stop him but without success. The man was determined and paid no attention. Unaware of a minefield, he stumbled on a mine and lost a leg. He was a mess and had to be carried back, bleeding profusely.

As the civil war stepped up, Ristana was assigned to various combat duties including manning anti-aircraft guns and guarding various strategic posts. Once again she was on guard duty at night and working during the day. All was going well until this particular day. Ristana remembered this day well because food rations were issued which included two kilos of canned beef. Ristana was paired up with Leftera and sent on a short assignment. They were issued a machine gun, two grenades, and one hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition each. Being already overloaded, both women felt it would be too much to carry food rations on top of the combat gear. Expecting to return no later than the next morning, they both left their food behind. It was a beautiful clear August night and not too chilly. As the women were enjoying the outdoors, their relief arrived unexpectedly early but instead of being relieved the women were dismissed. Word came that the Greek forces had already taken Roula and were fast approaching. The women were told to head for Albania and strongly advised against returning to camp. As the Greek tanks fast approached, pounding the terrain with artillery fire, Ristana and Leftera left for Albania. Their journey took them to Vambel where they found Stoian Boglev from Oshchima. Stoian's leg was wounded and he could not walk but confirmed the order to head for Albania. Once again scared, tired, and hungry Ristana and Leftera were running for their lives. After several days of dodging Greek patrols the pair arrived in Albania and surrendered their weapons to the local authorities. Then, after three days in Albania, Ristana's unit was regrouped, rearmed, loaded onto trucks, and taken to Gramos. While in Albania, Ristana was issued food rations of bread and raw meat. Each individual was responsible for finding the means to cook the meat or eat it raw. In addition to food, each combatant was issued a new Italian-made rifle, just uncrated and coated with grease. Since it had no shoulder strap Ristana converted her waist belt for that purpose and ripped parts of her shirt to clean off the grease before inspection. At Gramos, Ristana resumed her old duties of guarding by night and doing laundry and mending by day. Unlike the summer, however, it was now late August with frequent rainstorms and cold nights. The Greek forces were closing in making contacts and skirmishes unavoidable. One time she was on guard duty with a woman named Sofia. Lying flat on her stomach, Ristana noticed Sofia approaching and in a soft whispering voice told her that the Bourandari were in sight. Ristana ordered Sofia to grab her rifle and without firing a single shot, the pair ran for their lives. The rest of the unit had already retreated. It was raining that evening and the road was wet and muddy. It was hard to run with boots sticking to the mud, making each step a burden. Bullets rained down and rifles crackled in rhythm, mocking the runners at each step. Were they poor shots, or truly mocking the women? The pair survived the ordeal unscathed and later met up with other Macedonian women. Their camp had been captured and once again they were ordered to head to Albania. Ristana had problems with her feet and could not make the trip unaided. She

found a secluded place behind some rocks and spent the night there. In Albania, before arriving at camp, Ristana met Leftera and they took a diversion. Tired and hungry the pair went to look for food in a nearby village. There they were welcomed by a young Albanian mother and were given some bread to ease their hunger. Grateful for her hospitality, Ristana gave the woman her only prized possession, a sewing needle. After arriving at camp, Ristana found members of her family among the refugees who provided her with some comfort, spare clothes, and socks. Ristana, however, was not well as her ordeal had affected her health and she fell ill. After two weeks of recovery at the Albanian hospital, Ristana was well enough to re-join her unit and wanted to leave but was facing a new problem. The locals at Albanian were refusing to let her go, claiming that she was of marrying age and she should stay and marry a local boy. Ristana sought help from Mihail Filkov, an Oshchimian who was also at Albanian. Mihail agreed to take her case to headquarters. Mihail also informed Ristana that her unit was leaving soon and that it was imperative that she was there. Finally after much wrangling, she was released and reported for duty at her camp. After being examined by the doctors and issued new clothes and boots, Ristana's unit was shipped out, not to combat but to the Soviet Union. The war was over and the combatants joined the ranks of the refugees. The Greek Government did not want the refugees back so they shipped them out to the Eastern Block countries willing to take them. Ristana, along with others, was taken by truck to the port of Durres, loaded on a cargo ship, and smuggled into the Soviet Union via the Black Sea. From there they were transported to Tashkent, Uzbekistan by train and then by ship. Ristana remembers the voyage well. The cargo ship was a dump but the train and the liner were luxurious. The Soviets did their best to make the refugees feel welcome. Unfortunately, the seas were too rough for Ristana who suffered from motion sickness and could not enjoy the hospitality to its fullest.

It was late fall 1949 when Ristana arrived at her final destination in Tashkent. After spending a month in quarantine she, along with other refugees, was issued permanent quarters in a converted camp formerly occupied by Japanese prisoners of war. The compound was divided into rooms each with sleeping quarters for thirty-two people in sixteen bunk beds. There, Ristana met Nikola her future husband. Nikola, son of Dimitar and Lena was born on October 15th, 1929 in the village Trsino in the Voden region. Nikola completed grade two in public school before working full time on the family farm. Among other things, Nikola was a shepherd and cow herder. Nikola's village was famous for producing silk, paprika, and green onions. At age nine Nikola had a shocking experience that changed his life forever. On his way home from work, a policeman overheard him conversing with his cousin. Speaking Macedonian was illegal so the policeman grabbed Nikola and gave him the beating of his life. After that, Nikola developed a deep-seated fear of uniforms. This was demonstrated years later when he suddenly ran into a padar (vineyard guard), an old man in uniform. He ran instinctively for safety before he had a chance to realize that this was not a policeman and his life was not in danger,

As the Partisan movement began to end, Nikola's village experienced increased visits by Greek patrols. Some of the elements in the police force were unsavory and regularly sexually assaulted women. Having no recourse to fight back, much of the population was frustrated and had no alternative but to join the Partisans. This alone, however, was not enough to make Nikola leave his home. The breaking point came when he witnessed the death of an innocent twenty-three year old man. The young man was pushed into the funnel of a water mill and killed by the pressure of the water. The village was angered and on February 11, 1947, many young men, including Nikola, took up arms and left Trsino to join the Partisans in Gramos. There, Nikola was issued an automatic weapon and sent into combat at the various fronts. By the time the conflict ended, his unit of one hundred and twenty strong was reduced to eleven. When orders came to retreat, Nikola's unit was combined with another, with specific orders to enter Albania. Unfortunately, there was a misunderstanding between the Albanian border patrol and his command. After twelve grueling, hunger filled, and exhausting days they reached their destination. When they arrived, the active Macedonian leaders were arrested by the Greek Partisan authorities and later released by special request of the Soviet Government. Nikola left with the refugees and was taken to Tashkent.

Nikola met Ristana for the first time in November 1949 at the refugee camp in Tashkent. On December 4th, of the same year they married. Nikola joined a local construction company building houses for the refugees. Ristana took a job painting houses and delivering bricks to the bricklayers. Ristana found the

winter cold especially traveling in open transport trucks. About four months after her first job, Ristana found a new job at the aviation factory. She started the job as a lathe operator making airplane parts, then moved on and joined a riveting crew assembling airplane bodies. Nikola also changed jobs joining Ristana at the aviation factory making shipping boxes. A year and a half after settling down, Ristana and Nikola's first child, Dimitar was born on June 1st, 1951. Three years later a second child, Lena was born on April 15th, 1954. Sadly, however, Lena fell ill and died fourteen months later from severe diarrhea. Seven years had passed since Ristana and Nikola arrived in Tashkent but they still had hopes of returning home. Knowing that they had no chance of going back to Tresino or Oshchima, Nikola and Ristana decided to go and live in the Republic of Macedonia. Their third child, Sofia was born on August 1st, 1957 and with their application accepted, Nikola and his family left Tashkent September 14th, 1957 for Bitola.

Bitola was home but life was still difficult. Nikola found a job in construction while Ristana stayed home to look after the children. With the birth of their fourth child Violetta, born on April 12th, 1962, the Minovski's started looking towards Canada as a prospect for a better life. Members of Ristana's family lived there, including her mother and father who were willing to sponsor them. The Minovski family arrived in Toronto on July 8th, 1966 where they reside to this day.

Leffie (daughter of Krsto and Petra)

Leffie was born in Oshchima on April 10, 1936, the fourth child of Krsto and Petra.

Leffie, along with her family, survived the Second World War followed by the Greek civil war, a war that most Macedonians hoped would result in Macedonian independence from Greece. During the turmoil of this war, parents, fearful for the lives of their children, consented to allow their younger children to be taken away to other countries where they were promised safety. Leffie, along with her older brother, Don, and younger sister, Lena, were part of a group of these young children gathered to be taken to a safe haven.

The trip was fraught with hardship. The children, many as young as 4 years old, had to endure several obstacles on their trip to safety, walking over hills and mountains in very cold temperatures. Along the way the children were separated according to age and sent to different countries. Don was sent to Czechoslovakia while Leffie and Lena were sent to Bela Crkva, Yugoslavia.

All the children were forced to sleep in dormitories but at least they had a place to stay out of harm's way. While in Bela Crkva, they were treated well and educated but being separated from key family members was very difficult for them. To make matters worse, after only six months in Bela Crkva, Lena was separated from Leffie and sent to Osiek, Slovenia. Leffie, only twelve years old, spent the next three and a half years of her life alone, with no family around her. During this time many of the thousands of Begaltsi children she lived with became like her brothers and sisters to her.

In 1952, with the help of the Red Cross, Leffie's father, Krsto, who had earlier come to Canada, managed to find and bring Leffie to join him. She was the first family member Krsto was able to bring to Canada. Leffie, now sixteen, was very happy to finally be with her father. However, she was still concerned about her mother and younger brother Nick, back home and her older sisters, Tsana in Russia, Gena in Hungary, older brother, Don in Czechoslovakia, and her youngest sister, Lena, in Slovenia.

Leffie worked hard and saved her money to help her father buy a restaurant with hopes that the money earned would enable them to bring the entire family to Canada.

In 1954, now eighteen, Leffie met and married Steve, originally from Velushina, Bitolsko. Unlike Leffie, Steve hadn't experienced war in his childhood but he had also endured family separation. Steve's father, Dimko came to Canada in 1926 with hopes of starting a new and better life for his family. Steve was in his mother's womb when Dimko left the village for Canada and while Dimko worked hard to earn enough money to bring his family to join him, it took long twelve years. Steve was eleven years old when he met his father for the very first time.

Fortunately for Leffie, she and her father were able to bring her mother, younger brother, and younger sister to Canada in time for the wedding. At least she was able to have some of her family present to share in her wedding celebration.

Over the next fifteen years, Krsto was able to bring the rest of his family to Canada with the exception of Gena who had, by then, started her own family in Budapest and chose to remain there. One of the most memorable moments in the Boglis family was when Gena came to Canada for her first visit. Leffie had not seen her sister in over fifteen years, making this a very heart-felt reunion for Leffie, and the entire family. Krsto and Petra's dinner table was finally filled with all their children.

Leffie and Steve started a family of their own soon after their marriage. They had three children Linda, Chris, and Mary Ann who grew up appreciating the value of a close and loving family; something both Steve and Leffie were not as fortunate to experience during much of their childhood. Since Leffie never had the opportunity for a proper education, both she and Steve ensured that their children did. All three of their children achieved university degrees, enabling them to pursue their ambitions.

All Leffie and Steve's children are now married with their own children ranging from ages ten to eighteen. Leffie and Steve now have 7 grandkids who lovingly call them Baba and Dedo, appreciate the importance of their heritage, and believe that their Baba Leffie makes the world's best zelnik.

Nikola (son of Kata and Vlcho)

Kole, son of Kata and Vlcho was born in the village Zhelevo on December 4th, 1924. In 1929 when Kole was five years old, his mother Kata married an Oshchimian man named Florin and moved to Oshchima. Kole's father was deceased. From the ages of five to fourteen Kole drifted between living with his mother in Oshchima and his father's relatives in Zhelevo. Then at age fourteen his stepfather enrolled him in the School of Agriculture in Lerin. Unfortunately, in 1939, war between Italy and Greece broke out and all the schools were closed. Kole returned to Oshchima and lived with his mother until he joined Gotche's Partisans in 1942 and was captured by the Germans.

It was a cold morning on February 2nd, 1942. The ground was frozen and covered with a meter of snow. Gotche and his Partisans were in Prespa when the Germans came to pursue them. The Germans were fierce fighters and would not yield to Gotche's opposition. The brigade was running out of ammunition and had to leave for its own safety. As the Partisans climbed the mountains for Besfina the Germans switched their fire from machinegun to cannon. Luckily the exploding shells were ineffective in the deep snow and the brigade escaped unscathed.

After crossing the Albanian border, the brigade stopped for the night in Bilishcha. It was Kole's turn on guard duty so he and a fellow Partisan from Zhelevo took the first watch. Unfortunately, the Germans came again, this time from the opposite direction and surprised them. When the two guards saw the Germans they slipped into a barn hoping they would not be seen. In the quiet of the morning they tried to slip away but, unbeknownst to Kole, the Germans had surrounded the barn and snatched them as they came out. The next thing Kole remembers was being tied down on a bench in a basement, near a tap of running water. Kole was very thirsty so he motioned to one of the German soldiers towards the water. But instead of water, Kole received a swift kick to the side of his leg. The blow was so forceful that he thought the bone was sure to shatter. Kole was lucky his leg was only badly bruised and no bones were broken.

The next morning the Germans paraded their prisoners in public. There were eight of them, Kole, the other man from Zhelevo, two Serbians, two Albanians, and two Italians. With their hands tied behind their backs, connected by a rope tied at their necks, the prisoners were lined up single file. As they marched through the streets, the German guards constantly kicked the last man, an old Serb, and the poor man kept falling, pulling the entire line down. It was a painful and humiliating experience.

When they reached their destination the handcuffed men, still tied by the rope around their necks, were loaded in the back of a truck and shipped to Lerin. On the way to Lerin, Kole remembered he had a sheet of paper in his pocket with "anti-Hitler" songs written on it. Realizing the trouble he could get into if it

was discovered, he struggled hard and eventually freed his hands. Not knowing what to do with the paper, he tore it into small pieces and ate it piece by piece.

On its way to Lerin, the truck carrying the prisoners made a stopover at Zhelevo. When his mother found out, she rushed over to see him but he was not allowed to leave. She went to see Kalchev, a Bulgarian officer stationed in Zhelevo but he too could not help.

When the captives arrived at their destination and were placed in lockup for the night, Kole untied everyone's hands to give them some relief. In the morning he tied them again before they were taken and loaded on a train destined for Solun. With his hands loosely tied, Kole, while on the train, was contemplating an escape but was uncertain and needed some reassurances from the others. He rationalized that the Germans were going to kill him anyway, so why not take a chance and escape? By their silence Kole gathered that none approved so he decided against it.

When they arrived in Solun, the prisoners were taken to a post office, which had been converted to a jail, and locked up for the night. The next day they were taken to the Second Bulgarian School and surrendered to the Bulgarians. Kole remembered the Bulgarian soldiers held their bayonets horizontally as they escorted them. Had they held them vertically it would have meant respect for the prisoners. Their new quarters, a small room, were in a deep basement. The floor was lined with straw, teeming with lice. In fact, according to Kole there were more lice on the floor than there was straw.

Seven days had passed since Kole was captured and during that whole time he had eaten nothing. The men were kept locked up day and night with only a single washroom break per day, during the day. One of the Italian captives had drawn a loaf of bread on the wall and they admired it as if it were real.

After the seventh day the captives were again moved. They were loaded in the back of a dark, closed, box truck and taken to the Pavlos Melas 2nd maximum-security prison which was run by the Germans and their Greek allies. This was the prison for lifers from which no one returned. When they arrived, they were dusted for lice and given quarters on the fourth floor in the drying room of what once was a tobacco factory. In the evening the men were given their first meal in seven days which consisted of "all you can eat" watered down spinach and rice soup. Kole ate as much as he could until he could eat no more. It didn't take too long before his abdomen swelled up and he became sick. Between the itching from the lice and the pain from the swollen abdomen, Kole thought he was going to die.

The worst part about being in this prison was waiting for your name to be called. Each morning 20 to 30 names would be called and the men would be taken away to be executed. Kole was devastated one morning when the old Serb he had come to admire was taken away. The man smiled at Kole and waved goodbye. His last words were, "See you in the next life." The realization of what had just happened, shocked Kole and caused him to lose consciousness. He spent the next 33 days in hospital. While in hospital Kole's turn to be executed had come up and the Germans were looking for him.

Kole was fine and should have been released earlier but the Greek doctor in charge took pity on him and tried to save his life by keeping him longer. When the situation became desperate, the doctor scheduled him for surgery to remove his appendix. Unfortunately, before any surgery could be performed, it had to be approved by the German doctor. This bought Kole a few days but not enough to prevent him from being sent back to the prison. A few days later the German doctor pronounced Kole fit to be released and he was escorted back to jail. The trip back was a sad one as Kole passed by hundreds of women dressed in black roaming the streets weeping and mourning their dead husbands. While in prison, Kole lived on edge, waiting for his turn to meet the executioner. But as luck would have it, the English bombed Solun and Kole escaped unharmed.

It was a dark night when the first wave of airplanes flew by but no one gave it a second thought. Then the second wave came and parachuted bright flares that lit the night sky. Twenty minutes later the bombers came and dropped their thunderous load throughout the city. Solun was on fire, an ammunition warehouse was hit and the flames shot up a mile high. The prison was in chaos with the Germans and their Greek accomplices fleeing to save themselves, leaving the jailhouse unguarded.

Kole found his long sought opportunity to escape and took it. He lifted the cylindrical barbwire wall and slid out from under it. He was free at last as he ran with all his might through a maze of cornfields. When he came to a clearing he saw a woman with a little boy. Not knowing what to say, he asked her why she

was wearing black. "I am mourning my dead Partisan husband," she said. Feeling that he could trust her, Kole asked how he could get in touch with the Partisans. She gave him instructions and sent him off. Kole followed the brook as the woman had instructed and suddenly came upon a road, face to face with a man pointing a gun. "Before you shoot, tell me who are you with?" Kole inquired. "I am with the Partisans, I am a Partisan officer," replied the man. Kole's fear vanished as he introduced himself and sought help from the man. He took Kole to a house and introduced him to an old woman. He told him to stay with her until help arrived. The woman took Kole to a room full of wounded men and told him to stay put. In the morning a Bulgarian patrol passed by, knocking on doors, asking if anyone had seen any strangers. The woman was very clever and managed to avoid the wandering eyes from discovering her guests.

The next day, about twenty Partisans came and took Kole to a base in the Solunsko Polie where he surrendered himself to the commanding officer. After hearing his story, the officer seemed impressed and took Kole as his own assistant. For more than a month, Kole had the privilege of riding a horse and traveling next to the commander. Next he was transferred to Kukush and enrolled in military school. Kole found the physical training strenuous and exhausting but he managed to graduate as Sargent.

After Germany lost the war and began to evacuate, many of the local fascist factions remained active. It was now up to the Partisans to put them down and disband them. Kole took part in one of these battles. It was a large fascist force numbering about 3,500. They were well-armed fighters who refused to disband and were pursued by a larger force of 7,000 Partisans. The chase spanned fifty miles before the Partisans caught up to the fleeing fascists. Kole walked barefoot for most of the trip, because the new pair of shoes he had were a size too small. It was a long and arduous 50 miles. Finally, when the Partisans caught up with the fascists, they surrounded them in a village nestled between mountains. While the Partisans commanded the hills and had a strategic advantage the fascists more than made up for it with their superior German armament. It was a long bloody battle that lasted all night and through to the next evening. There were heavy casualties on both sides.

This was Kole's first serious brush with the brutality of war. Reality sunk in as he witnessed the decapitation of his friend, who he affectionately called "the doctor". As the battle raged on, Kole was lying in a shallow bunker next to his friend when suddenly his hat flew off. As he bent forward to pick it up, he heard a low thump. Looking in the direction of the sound, to his horror he saw his friend's head fly off. Before reality had a chance to sink in, he picked up his hat and put his finger through a hole in it. He too had been hit. After feeling his head looking for blood, Kole realized he was not harmed.

When the enemy relented and it was all over, Kole witnessed the true horrors of the battle. Many fighters on both sides were killed and left red stains of blood on the hillside. What was more horrifying were the cries of the dying. For them there would be no salvation.

It seemed that it was all over when the Partisans were convinced by the British to surrender their guns and disband in favour of participating in the national elections. Kole felt that he was finally free from the ordeals of war, and left for home. He walked from village to village from Solun to Zhelevo literally living off the generosity of strangers. In Yanitsa he found lodging in a place that had a hot wood burning stove and sacks of chestnuts just lying around. Roasted chestnuts were the best meal he had had in days. The trip took him two weeks but Kole made it home safe and sound.

It didn't take too long before Kole was again in the middle of another conflict. After disarming, many of the Partisan leaders were jailed by the goons in the British-backed Greek Royalist party. This prompted the Partisan leadership to take action and boycott the elections. Kole not only boycotted the elections himself, but he also publicly encouraged others to do the same as well.

Things went from bad to worse for Kole when a letter from the Partisans fell into the wrong hands. A man from Besfina was supposed to deliver a letter to Kole in Oshchima. Unfortunately, Kole at the time was not home so the man gave the letter to a neighbour. The neighbour secured the letter in her belt (poias) but somehow it fell out. As luck would have it, the wife of a local Greek Royalist collaborator found it and took it straight to the police. The letter was a request for Kole to surrender a rifle that he had been previously given. He had buried the rifle a long time ago and had forgotten about it. The police did not waste much time before they surrounded Kole's house and were knocking on his door. Kole's

grandmother spotted the policemen as they approached the house and advised him to leave. Kole could have easily slipped away but he had done nothing wrong. When he opened the door, without warning or explanation the men grabbed him and started beating him. He inquired as to why they were doing this but all they said was “You will find out soon enough.” Kole was hauled to the local school where a police official was waiting for him. He showed Kole the letter and demanded that he surrender the guns. Kole told him that he had no guns and the letter was a mistake. Kole knew better than to confess to possession, which at the time was an offence punishable by death. Kole also knew that the letter was altered, probably by the police, to say “guns” instead of “gun”.

When Kole did not voluntarily present any evidence, the police official accused him of possessing 28 rifles and took him for further interrogation. The woman (pregnant at the time) who had lost the letter and her husband were also arrested and taken for interrogation. All three had their feet tied to a rifle and the soles of their feet beaten. The pregnant woman and her husband were held for two weeks and released. Kole was sent to Solun to be executed. Three months later, a general amnesty for weapons possession was declared and Kole was set free.

After spending two months at home as a free man, Kole was again taken away. This time he was drafted by the Greek military and sent to Alexandroupoly for three months of training. Kole recalls he was issued a rifle but no ammunition. After completing his training he was sent to Athens to transport heavy artillery. Unfortunately, during one of his missions he accidentally overturned one of the vehicles and was charged with sabotage.

During his trial, Kole ran into a general who was married to a Macedonian woman from Lerin, whose family owned a bicycle shop. Lying to save his own skin, Kole convinced the general that he was a friend of the family and a regular customer at the bicycle shop. Kole was found not guilty.

After that, Kole was re-assigned to the medics as an ambulance driver. His most memorable assignment was when he was declared “best driver” after picking up wounded soldiers during a battle with the Partisans at Kailari. Kole completed his full draft with the Greek military and was released in December 1949. By then the Greek Civil War was over. Before leaving the military, Kole requested and was given a civilian job with the Red Cross in Zhelevo, his hometown. Kole served the local community, consisting of eight villages for over a year before leaving for Canada on December 16th, 1950. He arrived in Toronto on January 12th, 1951.

Kole was married before he left for Canada. In fact he wed his young bride the day before he left. Kole met Eftimia a year earlier at Kozheni, her hometown, while serving in the military. The couple met at Kole’s best friend’s wedding where Kole had the honour of being the best man. After his release from the military, Eftimia came to live with Kole in Zhelevo.

Six months after coming to Canada, Kole was able to raise enough money to be reunited with his wife. A month after her arrival in Toronto, Kole and Eftimia’s first son Louie was born on August 8th, 1951. After that the family was blessed with two more children, Manoly born October 5th, 1955 and Jim born June 3rd, 1961.

Naso (son of Vasil and Stoia)

Naso, son of Vasil and Stoia was born in the village Oshchima on April 16th, 1923 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada. As a young boy Naso completed grade six in public school in Oshchima then went to work on the family farm on a full time basis. Naso’s father Vasil left Oshchima for Canada in 1938 to seek work as a pechalbar. Being the oldest male in the household, Naso assumed responsibility for running the farm. Vasil had left home to find work many times before but had always come back. His first of five return trips to Canada took place in 1906. This time was different, however, as conflict was rising on the horizon. Naso would not see his father again for many years. Burdened with the responsibility of an adult, Naso did everything from tilling the soil and harvesting crops to cow herding and shepherding. Today Naso is almost eighty years old and does not remember much detail about his younger years but he cannot forget one particular incident. It was just another ordinary day in the routine

life of the young shepherd. His sheep were climbing up the Chershnik slope just above the Dzigerov kaliva (cottage) with Naso following close behind. As he passed the barn his concentration was interrupted by the sound of soft footsteps rustling in the dry summer grass. He turned to look and close behind him he saw a dog, a really big dog. It didn't take long for Naso to realize that the creature staring at him was not a dog but a very large wolf. His sheep were now in danger and Naso had to do something to scare it away. With all his might he mustered a long and loud yell, to no avail. The wolf only took a few steps away then circled around and came right back. "Why doesn't it run away or attack the sheep?" Naso thought to himself. After making more commotion by jumping up and down and yelling, Naso came to the realization that the wolf was not going to leave. "If it is not after the sheep it must want to eat me," he thought to himself. He was just a small boy and did not want to die this way, he thought to himself as fear began to paralyze him. But the sound of barking dogs in the distance gave him renewed courage. A pack of dogs from the village had picked up the wolf's scent and arrived in time to save Naso and sent the wolf running for its life. His experience taught him to be fearful of wolves but left him with a good story to tell.

As Naso grew older he met and married Sevda, a young Oshchimian girl. Their wedding took place on September 12th, 1942. Sevda, daughter of Iovan and Tsveta was born on February 24th, 1924. Sevda completed grade six in public school and assumed responsibility in the Popov household and on the farm before her marriage to Naso. Like many young Oshchimian girls, Sevda learned to cook, knead bread, knit and crochet garments and acquired many other skills expected of a young Oshchimian. Their wedding was memorable especially after hiring Ilo Timio's band from Trnaa; the most talented musicians in the region. After their wedding, Sevda moved in with Naso's family in the Novacev household. A year or so later, fearing German reprisal, Oshchimians left the village for the safety of the hills and forest and many settled near Kshche Ritche. This was a zone frequented by the Partisans and served as a source of new recruits. At the time recruits were generally volunteers but as needs increased more pressure was applied to motivate men, especially married men, to join the cause. Naso remembers the day he was recruited. He and some other men were up in the forest cutting wood for fuel when they were approached by Partisans and asked to participate in blowing up a small bridge. It was supposed to be a onetime assignment. Several men volunteered and talked Naso into going along also. They succeeded in destroying the bridge but did not stop the Germans who used a portable bridge and carried on with their advance. After that, one assignment led to another and Naso found himself involved with the Partisans on a full time basis. After blowing up the bridge, Naso was sent to Statitsa for training and carried out various assignments. The next time he came home it was for only a day, to harvest shouma (oak leaves) for someone in Oshchima. By 1944 Naso was assigned to Goche's Partisan brigade and sent to Yugoslavia to liberate Macedonia from the Fascists. Just before leaving, he returned home to gather a few necessities and visit his pregnant wife and family for the last time. While Naso fought the Albanian Balisti in Tetovo, Sevda stayed home with her mother-in-law and on May 5th, 1945 gave birth to daughter Fana. The stress of being alone with a young child, coupled with worries for the safety of her family, was too much for Sevda to cope with and she fell ill. When the Partisans came looking for her, she was too sick and escaped the draft that swallowed so many other young Oshchimian women. On March 25th, 1948 Sevda entrusted Fana to the care of the Oshchimian surrogate mothers and sent her off to the safety of eastern block countries with the refugee children. Fana eventually ended up in Poland. In the fall of 1949, during the last refugee evacuation, Sevda also left Oshchima and was eventually settled in Poland. For six years mother and daughter lived in the same country but in different cities. While Fana attended school, Sevda worked in a dormitory looking after children. Only twice a year, during holidays were they able to get together for a visit. Four years later the dormitory moved to another city and Sevda was without a job. Eventually she found another job working in a factory making macaroni. She worked there for the next two years before coming to Canada.

After the Germans were driven out of Yugoslavia and pockets of local Fascist bands were defeated, Goche's Partisan brigade was disbanded. The men who fought side by side were given the choice of joining the regular army or becoming civilians. Naso chose the latter, moved to Skopje and found a job in construction. He desperately wanted to go to Canada to be with his father but politics at the time would

not permit it. It took Naso some time but he found a way to get out. In late 1951, Naso went for a visit to Austria and contacted his father to make the necessary arrangements to get him out. Being a refugee, however, made things a bit difficult. Canada wanted a character reference, which took about a year and a half to produce before he was allowed entry. With the assistance of the Red Cross, Naso left Austria and arrived in Toronto on December 23rd, 1953 just in time to celebrate Christmas with his father.

Upon his arrival, the first order of business was to reunite his family. Again with the assistance of the Red Cross, a year and a half later Naso was able to bring his wife and daughter home. Sevda and Fana arrived in Toronto on June 24th, 1955. Fana was ten years old when she met her father for the first time. She was a shy child and would hardly talk to people she knew. In her mind her father was a man who lived far away in Canada. This man was a stranger and she wanted nothing to do with him. It took Fana a long time before she was able to accept Naso as her father. About nine years after their reunion in Toronto, on April 13th, 1962 Naso and Sevda's son Vasil (William) was born.

In spite of past hardships and sad memories, in 1985 Naso went back to Oshchima to re-visit his birthplace. His visit brought back old memories, both happy and sad. He was happy to see the land where as a youngster he played and toiled but was saddened to see the ruinous state of his beloved Oshchima. Naso remembered the happiness, laughter, singing and dancing, the glistening exterior whitewash of the houses, now all gone. Only silence and ruins remained. Naso recollected the day the barns were burned down and the great fires that almost destroyed Oshchima. It was late fall and the barns were full of winter feed, straw, hay, and crops. The Greek police burned them down claiming they were Partisans hideouts. Naso knew there were no Partisans there and the real reason for burning them was to bring hardship and starvation to the people. Naso is so grateful to be away from all of this and still cannot believe that the nightmare is over and he is reunited with his family.

Naso and Sevda are grateful to those people who went out of their way to reunite their family and to Canada for opening their doors and offering opportunities to those less fortunate.

Stato and Jimmy (sons of Vasil and Iordana)

Stato and Jimmy (Mito), sons of Vasil and Iordana were born in the village Oshchima. Stato was born on September 20th, 1933 and Jimmy on August 5th, 1935. Stato and Jimmy are two of five siblings, sister Dafina, and brothers Naso from the same father but different mothers and Iane Stojchev Iankulovski from the same mother but different father. Iane was in his early twenties when he was captured while fighting for the Partisans and executed by the Greeks

As young boys, Stato and Jimmy received practically no education while living in Oshchima. The school was closed due to the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war in the fall of 1940. During their youthful days the young boys worked on the farm shepherding, cow herding, and generally helping out with chores on the homestead.

After the outbreak of the Greek Civil War, like many other villages, Oshchima became a target for Greek bombs and it was no longer safe for civilian life. As part of the "save the children" program Stato and Jimmy, along with many other Oshchimian children, were evacuated to Eastern Block countries.

Their long ordeal started on March 25, 1948 when all the children from Oshchima were gathered together, for what was to be a temporary evacuation, and sent out of the country. Stato being the eldest was given the responsibility for looking after Jimmy as well as his niece Fana (brother Naso's daughter). Fana was very young, almost three years old, and Stato was responsible for looking after her.

Left in the care of surrogate mother Sevda Lazarou (Mitoitsa Lalova), the two young boys along with the other children left Oshchima and arrived in Shtrkovo, Prespa where they spent the night. The next day the group crossed over the Yugoslav border into Luboino. Before crossing the children were asked to leave their belongings behind, being reassured that a Partisan wagon would deliver them the next day. The boys' mother had prepared a roast and packed a sack full of food as well as a change of clothing and blankets for the boys and Fana. The wagon never arrived and the group was left without food or clothing.

After spending the night in Luboino, fifteen children to a room, they were loaded into military trucks and taken to Bitola. Without food or blankets, the children found the nights very cold.

They spent a day in Bitola before they were loaded onto train cars and sent to Brailovo for about two months. There the children and surrogate mothers were left on their own and slept in barns. Stato and Jimmy would have abandoned the group and fled home, but it was not possible with Fana in their care. They were so hungry they had to scour the countryside looking for food, even resorting to killing wildlife to satisfy their hunger.

Once again the children were loaded onto train cars and sent to various destinations. Stato and Jimmy were sent to Romania to a camp called "Kalimaneshti" where they spent about four months. There they were housed in an old hospital and again left on their own. Many of the children were unhappy and frustrated, constantly fighting with each other.

Finally the children were sent to permanent destinations and Stato and Jimmy ended up going to Poland. It was late fall, in 1948, when they arrived in a town called "Londenkzrui". It was a beautiful place with natural springs and holiday resorts. The moment they arrived, the children were stripped naked, bathed, and placed in quarantine for a while to get rid of lice and other pests they had contracted. In comparison to where they had previously been, this place was like heaven. After spending some time in isolation, the children were assigned to homes and enrolled in schools.

After spending a few years in primary school, Jimmy and Stato decided to pursue separate careers in education. In 1953, Jimmy enrolled in high school and among other things studied music. Stato decided to go to a technical college and study precision equipment and tool making.

Jimmy took a liking to and learned to play the mandolin and some piano. Jimmy was doing well in his studies until his first contact with the Red Cross. Vasil, Jimmy and Stato's father, was in Canada at the time and through the Red Cross was engaged in a search for his children. As soon as he found them, he filed papers to bring them home to Canada. Jimmy was so excited about the prospect of going to Canada that he immediately quit school. He arrived in Toronto on September 30th, 1955.

Stato decided to stay a while and attended an international youth festival that was held in Poland that year. Stato arrived in Toronto on December 25th, 1955.

Being a Canadian citizen since 1932, Vasil was able to register each of his sons as Canadian citizens right after their birth. Both Stato and Jimmy, before leaving Poland, were issued Canadian passports by the Canadian Embassy and came home as Canadian citizens. Upon arrival, the brothers joined the work force and for their first jobs, both worked as dish washers in the restaurant business. Jimmy worked for Spiro Bassil a fellow Oshchimian and Macedonian activist. The same year they arrived in Toronto, both brothers signed up and became members of "Benefit Society Oshchima".

On August 9th, 1963 Jimmy married Sofia Ramova an Oshchimian girl whom he knew and grew up with in Poland. Sofia, daughter of Foto and Grozda Ramos was born in Oshchima on April 23rd, 1940. Sofia left Oshchima as a refugee with her parents in the fall of 1949 before the conclusion of the Greek Civil War. Eight years after leaving, Jimmy went back to Poland, married Sofia in a civil wedding and brought her home to live with him in Canada. Jimmy and Sofia have two children, Donna born in Toronto on January 30th, 1966 and Danny also born in Toronto on May 1st, 1968. Jimmy opened his own restaurant in 1972 working for himself until his retirement in the year 2000.

Stato too married a Macedonian girl and long time friend. Stato went to school with Christine in Poland and when he found out she had come to Canada he resumed his relationship with her. Christine daughter of Trifonas and Eleni Trifon, born on May 1st, 1936 in Krchishcha married Stato in Toronto on May 9, 1965. Christine was sponsored and brought to Canada by her sister and grandfather in 1962. Christine had completed her education in Poland and graduated in the field of pharmacy. Unfortunately, she did not pursue her educational career in Canada. Stato and Christine have two children both born in Toronto. Helen was born on March 19th, 1966 and Jimmy was born on January 27th, 1969. Tragically, Christine passed on, on December 26th, 1992 at age 56. Stato in January 1993, after working 36 years took an early retirement at age 60.

In time, the entire Petrou family migrated to Canada and they all currently live in Toronto.

Naso (son of Pavle and Rena)

Naso, son of Pavle and Rena was born in the village Oshchima on November 27th, 1945.

Naso comes from a family of activists and fighters who for generations fought for the Macedonian cause.

Pop Giorgi, Naso's great grandfather was Oshchima's first priest to die for what he believed in.

Karavangelis had him assassinated for opposing Helenism. Trpo Popovski, Naso's grandfather was a great teacher and fighter who also opposed Helenism.

Pavle Popovski, Naso's father was a Partisan who first fought against the Germans for the liberation of his country. He also fought for the liberation of Vardar Macedonia and later fought at home for the rights of the Macedonian people in Greece. Unfortunately, he lost his life in action in Gramos before he had a chance to see his son grow. Naso does not remember his father and only knows of him from his mother and people who knew him. Naso also had two uncles named Stojan and Krsto. Unfortunately, like Naso's father, Stojan was killed in action. The three brothers Pavle, Stojan, and Krsto (youngest) fought side by side in the Macedonian brigades during the Greek Civil War. Krsto, the only survivor, moved to Skopje after the war where he completed teachers college and went on to study philosophy. He then devoted the rest of his life to teaching. Krsto Popovski, born in 1926 in Oshchima, lived a fruitful life with his wife Slavka and daughter Jordanka. He passed away April 24, 1992 in Skopje.

Naso was too young to remember anything about Oshchima. He was only two and a half years old when he left and became a refugee child. From what he was told, Naso was evacuated on March 25, 1948 as part of the "save the children" program. Naso's mother along with other Oshchimian mothers took their children to Albania and left them there to be evacuated. The children were then transported to one of Albania's ports where they boarded a cargo ship and were sent to Poland.

In Poland they were placed in a dormitory for orphaned children where Naso spent the next two years attending school. Naso's mother left Oshchima in 1949 and became a refugee herself. Fortunately she too was sent to Poland and was able to reunite with her son. While in Poland, Naso spent ten years attending school. After finishing grade eight, he enrolled in a technical college and completed the course a year before leaving for Macedonia.

In 1962 Naso and Rena left for Vardar Macedonia where Naso completed three years of technical school and graduated as a millwright. Upon graduation, Naso was drafted into the Yugoslav military where he spent the next two years serving in the navy. After completing his draft Naso went to Bitola and enrolled in a two-year technical program to study machine design. After graduating, Naso took on a job as a millwright department supervisor.

Vase, daughter of Milan and Trajanka Stankoski from Prilep was only sixteen years of age when she first met Naso. Vase was born on November 6th, 1952 in the village Lenishche, near Prilep. After finishing high school she enrolled in a two-year college program and graduated in economics. Naso and Vase were married in Macedonia in 1970. Their son Pavle was born on April 7th, 1972.

After spending thirteen years in Macedonia, the Popovski family immigrated to Canada, arriving in Toronto on June 1st, 1975. To support his family, Naso took a job with the Toronto Star and put his experience, gained in Macedonia, to work repairing machines in the Star's machine shops. Vase, while looking after her son Pavle, also managed to enroll in language school and learned English.

Naso has always been passionate about sports and a couple of years after coming to Canada became involved in coaching soccer. He has spent the last twenty years coaching at the Scarborough Blues Soccer Club producing world class athletes, five of whom are currently playing for European national teams.

During his time as coach, the club has won the Ontario soccer cup three times and has six players under the age of nineteen playing for national teams. With encouragement from Vase, Naso is now coaching an all girls soccer team.

Fania (daughter of Naum and Neda)

Fania, daughter of Naum and Neda was born in Oshchima on September 24th, 1926. Fania completed grade six in the Oshchima public school before she went to work full time helping her parents on the family homestead.

Fania was barely over sixteen when she married Traiko Raikovski, a young Oshchimian man. Traiko, son of Kote and Neda Raikovski, was born on October 26th, 1922 and was twenty years of age when he married Fania on November 2nd, 1942.

The wedding took place during the Italian occupation at a time when the entire region was experiencing a terrible economic slump. The Greek Government had collapsed and the currency was worthless. Fania remembers receiving a lot of money, as wedding gifts, but it was worthless. Fortunately, Traiko was a self-employed tailor and was able to provide for his young bride. Fania too kept busy by helping out in the tailor shop mending, washing, and pressing garments.

Besides experiencing economic hardships, the people of Oshchima were also drawn into the Partisan conflict. Traiko was no exception and when duty called he joined Voivoda, Mito Tupurkovski's band to fight the Germans. After Greece was liberated, Mito's Partisans crossed over into Yugoslavia and fought the Balisti to liberate the Republic of Macedonia. Then, when the Greek Civil War broke out, many of Mito's fighters, including Traiko, went back to fight for better living conditions at home for the Macedonian people in Greece.

Fania also took part in the Partisan conflict, not as a fighter, but as an organizer. Her main duties were to distribute food from the central depot in Papli to the various surrounding villages and to the Partisans operating in the vicinity.

Traiko and Fania's first child Lena was born on January 14, 1944. By the time their son George (Giorgi) was born, on December 22nd, 1947, Traiko was fighting the Greek army in Gramos.

Unfortunately, the Partisans lost the war, forcing Traiko to leave home and become a war refugee in the Soviet Union. Traiko never got the chance to see his son grow. Fania kept working for the Partisans until the end of the war and as a result was captured by the Greek military. Fania and her mother-in-law were preparing to leave at dusk the same day the Greek army descended on Oshchima and captured them. Fania not being a Partisan was not harmed.

As soon as the Greek army invaded Oshchima, all Oshchimians and their livestock were evacuated to Zhelevo. Fania was assigned residence in the Balkovski household where she spent the next two years. Her fields and property, unfortunately, were in Oshchima where she had to make the daily trek to work. On top of that, the police constantly harassed her about permission to travel and the observance of curfew. Soon after Fania and her son George came back to Oshchima, she began the long search for her husband and daughter. Her daughter Lena had been evacuated on March 25th, 1948, as part of the "save the children" program and by 1951 was settled in the refugee camps of Bela Tsrkva in Yugoslavia.

Fania's request to repatriate her family was answered by the Greek administration. Unfortunately the answers she received were not favourable. She was told that Traiko could never return because the Greek Government had charged him with treason and his sentence was execution. Lena on the other hand could only return with royal approval by non-other than the Greek Queen Friderika herself.

Fania at the time was financially well off. Her father looked after her by sending her money from Canada. Naum, Fania's father, was a regular visitor to Canada. His first visit was as a pechalbar (migrant worker) from 1930 to 1935. In 1935 he briefly came back home to build a house and returned to Canada the same year. After that, the conflicts kept him away until 1957 when once again he came back to see his home and daughter. Naum was saddened by the condition of his village, his home, and the plight of his daughter and was determined to re-unite his family.

In spite of being told that it was foolish to attempt the impossible, Fania put the money her father had provided to good use and appealed to the Greek Queen to allow her daughter to come home. It took some time, but her appeal was answered and Lena came home on May 25th, 1958.

Without a husband, there was no future for Fania in Oshchima so she took George with her and left in 1959 to join her father in Canada. Even though life was good in Canada, both George and Fania longed for Traiko and made every effort to reunite with him. Unfortunately, the iron curtain was shut tight and it was virtually impossible to penetrate.

Instead of giving up, the family took a different approach. In 1965 Fania and George decided to move to Yugoslavia (Republic of Macedonia), a more neutral place, which allowed immigration from both the USSR and Canada. Traiko too made arrangements and was released by the Soviet Union. On the day of his father's arrival, George traveled to Belgrad and met his father for the first time.

Traiko had work experience in the steel industry in the Soviet Union, which helped him find a good job in Macedonia. After spending seven years in Macedonia, in 1972, the family immigrated to Canada and Traiko pursued his old career taking on a job at a metal works factory in Oakville. George resumed his education and became an accountant.

Tragically, Traiko passed on at age 58 in January 1981. Fania still lives in the original home the family purchased in Mississauga in 1972 and today enjoys being with her three very young great grandchildren.

Vasil (son of Risto and Sofia)

Vasil, son of Risto and Sofia was born in the village Oshchima on August 15th, 1925 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada. Vasil attended school up to grade 6 and is proud to say he graduated with a mark of 90%.

After completing grade school, Vasil went to work on the family homestead on a full time basis. After the death of his brother Lazo, Vasil being the eldest male living at home, assumed responsibility for most household activities. His father Risto worked outside Oshchima, sometimes abroad, and was unavailable for household duties for most of the year. Yields from the land were not sufficient to support a family of twelve so Risto had no choice but to seek employment elsewhere. Before Lazo's death, on many occasions, Vasil assisted his father with his projects. This included many trips to Prespa and Albania, which sometimes lasted for months.

Vasil's father Risto (File and Stamen's son) was born in 1883 in the village Oshchima and died in 1951 in Warsaw, Poland. During his youth, Risto made a living house painting, bricklaying, and doing masonry work. He was also a capable woodworker, lumberjack, and carpenter.

During his adult life, Risto was a pechalbar and traveled from place to place looking for work. He traveled to Prespa, Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Central Greece, and Canada. Due to severe weather, stranded in Bulgaria, Risto attended school and learned the Macedonian alphabet enabling him to read Macedonian. On another occasion, while working in Turkey (Anatolia), Risto lost his uncle Kale in a construction accident. Kale fell off the roof of the building they were working on and died.

While seeking work the expense of travel was a burden to them so to minimize their costs, Risto and his traveling companions begged for food and shelter while traveling from village to village. Risto did not speak Greek, and while traveling to central Greece he depended on his first cousin Tase and other co-workers, to seek directions and acquire contracts.

Risto traveled to Canada three times. There he worked in tanneries, restaurants, and laid cobblestone in the streets of Toronto. On one occasion when Risto came back from Canada, an entourage of people from Oshchima came to greet him. In front stood his wife Sofia with two young girls in her arms. In a stern voice she asked him, "You've been away so long I bet you can't recognize your own daughter?" Risto cleverly replied, "Put the girls down and the one that comes to me is my daughter." Sure enough Dafina rushed to him, proving him right.

With the money earned, in 1922 Risto built a house in Oshchima on top of the ruins of the Iofkova house. As payment to purchase the plot Risto granted Bosilka Iofkova and her daughter Sofia, free room and board for life. To expand his homestead, Risto purchased land from Tase who moved to Lerin and no longer needed his property. Risto gave some of the land to his older brother Vasil.

There is a tale told about Risto's money. After returning from Canada, Risto converted his earned wealth from gold into Greek currency in order to purchase building materials for his house. Unfortunately, at that same time war broke out and the Greek currency lost its value. Tragically, Risto lost his wealth. It has been rumoured that his wife Sofia cursed him for leaving her for so long to bear the burden of raising the children alone in such harsh conditions. It has also been rumoured that Risto did not convert his gold to

cash, but instead buried it somewhere in Oshchima, perhaps never to be found. These however, are only rumours?

Year after year, Risto traveled to Prespa and Albania to work as a painter, bricklayer, plasterer, and occasionally as a carpenter. According to some of his clients, Risto was the best chimney builder in the region.

From 1920 to 1922, Risto was drafted by the Greek army and served as a border guard at the Albanian-Greek border. In 1948, during the Greek civil war, he was drafted by the Partisans to build bunkers. In 1949 Risto, along with many other Greek Civil War refugees, left home for the last time never to return. Risto accompanied by his wife Sofia and son Alexander on August 10, 1949, left for Albania. From there he was sent to Poland, where he later was reunited with his daughter Sevda. While in Poland, Risto became very ill and disabled, dependent on his wife and daughter to look after his daily needs. He slowly fell into a depression and could no longer bear his condition and died in 1951. His body was buried in Poland where it remains to this day. According to those who knew him in person, Risto was a gentleman well respected by all. He was a hard worker and an honest man.

With the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war in 1940, like many young men, Vasil found himself in the middle of a brewing controversy. At that time the Greek communist party was growing in strength and recruiting young Macedonian men and woman into their ranks with promises of freedom, human rights, and equality for all Macedonians. Organizers frequently came calling on the young to join. In 1943 Vasil, along with other idealists from Oshchima, signed up and became a party member. In June of 1944 Vasil was drafted by the Partisan police force and sent to Lagen near Vicho where he served as a police officer from July to September. When his service ended, Vasil joined the youth group and was allowed to go home provided he returned to service on short notice. His leave lasted until March 2nd, 1947 when Vasil was recalled to fight in the Greek civil war. He, along with about five thousand Partisans, was trained, armed, and sent to serve at various posts between Vicho and Gramos. After two years as a courier Vasil achieved the rank of second lieutenant. During his career as a Partisan, Vasil saw much action and experienced pain and suffering. One time after a bomb exploded Vasil was knocked unconscious. Thinking that he was dead, his comrades, hurrying to avoid capture, buried him by piling stones on his body. Hours later, Vasil awakened traumatized and confused, dug himself out of the rock pile and went wandering the countryside. The trauma had left him with short-term memory loss, which took hours before he was able to comprehend his predicament. He recalls his chest being bruised and having severe pain and difficulty breathing. His chest trauma subsequently re-occurred for six years, each year on the anniversary of the episode.

After his recovery, Vasil was assigned to lighter duties delivering information between commands. This lasted until mid 1948 when once again fate dealt him a different hand. It was a rainy, fog filled morning when Vasil was ordered to deliver mail to a nearby battalion. On his way he ran into enemy fire and was almost hit by mortar. He was not directly hit but a spray of rock and sand lightly injured his leg and temporarily blinded his eyes. Under the cover of fog, however, Vasil was able to slip out and escape enemy detection. He arrived at his destination intact and successfully completed his mission. But as luck would have it, a battle was brewing and men were needed to fight. In spite of his injuries and inability to see properly, the local commander detained Vasil and ordered him to take part in the fight. This was an important fight defending a strategic position. The men were given strict orders to hold on to it no matter what happened. Soon the enemy engaged them and the battle lasted until dusk. When it was over, eight out of the fifty-six Partisans that took part were killed. Vasil was wounded in the back, but the enemy advance was repelled.

Vasil was taken to a nearby field hospital and had his wounds looked after. His recovery, however, was brief and prematurely interrupted by a courier who delivered orders to evacuate. Because the Bourandari (Royal Greek forces) were fast approaching and the hospital staff needed time to evacuate, all available able hands, including the wounded, were ordered to fight and stall the advance. Vasil remembers it was a fierce battle. The Partisans fought with mere guns against the onslaught of mortar and machinegun fire. Being unprepared the Partisans ran out of ammunition. Those able to move escaped while the rest fought to the end. Only five made it out alive. During his retreat, Vasil spotted a supply man in the distance, but

before he could get to him, a mortar fell killing him and his mule. Vasil picked up what he needed and continued his retreat. He was on the run when a Bourandar, hiding behind a rock, fired at him. It was a loud burst of machinegun fire. Vasil with his automatic rifle in one hand and gear in the other ran into the woods for cover. He realized that his diversion would take him away from his destination, but what choice did he have? His escape route was in the open and dangerous. As he contemplated his predicament, Vasil heard a woman's voice in the distance crying out for help. The woman called out in Macedonian then in Greek. It appeared that she was wounded and could not move. He quickly went to her aid and as their conversation ensued, he found out she was from Nestram, a Macedonian village. He picked her up, put her over his shoulder and carried her through the woods. His effort, however, was in vain as a mortar fell in close proximity instantly killing the woman with a severe blow to the head. Vasil was devastated, dropped the woman's body, and ran. Unable to properly see, he lost his bearings and did not know where he was. He realized he had left the woods when he heard the dreaded roar of a fighter plane overhead and watched the dust ripples of bullets running by. He ran as fast as he could, watching the ripples come and go again and again as fire from the sky rained down on him. It seemed like an eternity as the two planes circled around from above again and again, mocking him and playing with his life. Finally he was in the safety of the woods. He was still running when he encountered the cliff of a sinkhole and almost fell in it. It was one of those phenomena that naturally occur in nature due to years of limestone erosion. Vasil was lucky he stopped in time. He paused for a moment looking down when he heard a man's voice softly muttering something to him. The words were Greek and beckoned him to come closer with promises of ending his misery forever. He slowly looked up in the direction of the voice, coming from the other side of the cliff. As Vasil's sore eyes began to focus he saw a man and recognized his uniform, that of a Bourandar officer. During his ordeal Vasil must have somehow circled back and was now in the hands of the enemy. Too many things had happened that day and Vasil was in no mood for mockery as he opened fired. He doesn't remember how his rifle got into his hands, but he was grateful it was there. He thinks it came off his shoulder during his abrupt encounter with the sinkhole. Figuring him for a deserter, the unexpected burst of automatic fire surprised the enemy. As Vasil continued to fire, fearing an ambush, the Bourandari quickly retreated.

Vasil tired, wounded, and hungry made it back to Breznitsa where he came upon a stream of water. Being thirsty and watching the water trickle down the stream made him want a drink badly. Vasil knew that in his condition he couldn't have any, he had seen the wounded die after drinking water. Vasil succumbed to his thirst and had a sip. After that, he reported to local command and asked them for transportation to the hospital. He was refused, as there were too many other priorities. Vasil left, disappointed, and spent two days in Rula (Ano Rulski) before walking to Preol where he, along with one hundred and fifty other wounded, boarded two trucks destined for the Yugoslav border. The first truck was allowed entry but the second was refused and turned back. Vasil made it in and was taken to a hospital in Koutlanovo to recuperate. After fifteen days of hospitalization and daily baths in the thermal springs, Vasil fully recovered from his wounds. It was now time to leave so Vasil, along with sixty others, was ordered to report to Pozdivishcha for re-assignment. Vasil was re-assigned to the fourteenth brigade at the village Kazani in Kostour. His new commander was an old acquaintance who recognized Vasil from a previous meeting they had in 1945 at the village Papratsko. Vasil was campaigning there for the Partisans when he met the man for the first time. The new boss gave Vasil command of twenty men and put him in charge of guarding Kolomnati. Vasil remembers this day well, as he ordered his men to take up position inside a patch of tall ferns, behind some stones. It was the same day that Georgi Boglev from Oshchima was captured. With four machine guns on standby, the men hid in the ferns and kept silent for most of the day. This went on from dawn until about four in the afternoon when a guard noticed movement from the direction of Bapchor. It was a band of Bourandari coming. Vasil ordered his men to take their position and hold their fire. After a brief firefight, feeling the sting of the ambush, the Bourandari retreated. In other parts of the battle, however, Partisan units did not fare as well and many men and women lost their lives during the fight. When it was over, all able bodies, including the lightly wounded, were ordered to retreat and regroup. At the new camp, combatants were separated according to education and technical skills with military equipment. The more educated were made officers and given command positions

regardless of their combat experience. The rest were assigned to lower ranks. Having over two years of combat experience and being a trusted courier, Vasil was not happy with his demotion into the lower ranks. He complained to the commanding officer and asked for his rank to be reinstated. The officer was unmoved by his plea and ordered him to either pick a weapon and stay where he was or leave and join another command. Vasil chose to stay and took his case to the battalion commander. The top boss heard Vasil's case and gave him command of a guard unit comprised of three men and a woman. After spending ten days at camp, Vasil's unit was sent on assignment to guard a work crew of sixteen women and several mules, responsible for picking grapes and apples. When they arrived at their destination, the group encountered several rotting human skulls propped up on wooden stakes. The heads belonged to the guards of a previous work crew ambushed by the Bourandari. Hesitantly, the crew began picking grapes while the guards, certain of an impending ambush, took up defensive positions. True to expectation, before they were finished, several shots rang out sending everyone for cover. The Bourandari came back with high hopes, but the guards fought fiercely and repelled the attack. The crew, fearing for their lives fled the scene. Vasil, along with the other guards, assembled the mules along with the grapes and left for Posdivishcha to pick apples. There to their surprise, they found the missing crew hiding inside the village. In spite of their desertion, no charges were laid against members of the crew. When Vasil returned to camp he heard from the news wire that his skirmish left one Bourandar dead and one wounded. After that assignment Vasil was transferred to a battalion near the village Boukovik to prepare for battle. The frontline was ordered to penetrate a triple barrier of barbed wire, laced with activated grenades. When they reached their target, a man experienced in mine removal breached the first and second barriers but discovered a land mine and could not penetrate the last barrier. As a result, the advance was halted and the combatants refused to continue until the area was de-mined. The unit commander disagreed with the assessment and called the men cowards for not proceeding. In spite of the danger he went forward to show them how it was done. Unfortunately, he stepped on a mine and was blown up. The force of the explosion shook the fence and triggered activated grenades causing them to explode. As the startled men retreated in panic, Vasil remembers taking a glimpse of a dying woman lying on the ground with a large hole in her back. After the danger passed, Vasil felt severe pains in his head. A quick examination revealed wounds to his head, leg, and hand. Vasil walked back to command and was taken to a nearby field hospital. He lost a lot of blood and went into shock before he passed out. Next he remembers hearing a voice and opening his eyes to bright sunlight. It was almost noon the next day and he had slept through the night. The voice that woke him was that of an old man whom Vasil knew. The old man advised Vasil to leave at once because the Greek forces were advancing quickly and his life was in danger. The field hospital was evacuated in the dark, the night before and the camp was abandoned. Vasil was unable to walk on his own so he asked the man to fashion him a crutch from a tree branch. Before he could get too far, however, the Bourandari arrived and started shooting. Vasil made an effort to hide but was spotted. The next thing he remembers was a sharp pain in his leg and rolling down a steep hill. He was wounded in the same leg again. One of the Bourandars went looking but would not risk going down the hill so he abandoned the search. Vasil passed out and when he came to he remembers feeling very cold, fists clasped tight, and teeth clenched. He had fallen into a sandy pit and was now trapped. He was lucky, however, because soon after the Bourandari left a deliveryman came by and found him. Vasil convinced the man to take him to the hospital. He went to another camp by mule and from there to Posdivishcha by horse. On their way the men heard the roar of a bomber which sent them scurrying. Vasil urged the man to run for cover while he slumped off the horse and rolled into an irrigation ditch. The horse took off down river and disappeared. The water was running fast and felt cold as Vasil submerged himself out of sight when a bomb fell nearby, temporarily rendering him deaf. When the danger was over, unable to walk, he pulled himself out of the ditch and waited. Another man came by and helped Vasil to his feet. Fearing more encounters from above, Vasil asked the man to help him hide in a nearby garden, close to the river. The garden was fenced in and its foliage provided good cover. Soon after, the first man came back with the horse but refused to go any further because he felt it was too dangerous. He helped Vasil mount the horse and left. Vasil's latest wound was high up on his leg impairing his riding and causing him severe pain. Having no other choice, Vasil rode to Posdivishcha. The doctor there examined him and

recommended that he be taken to the hospital at Kolomnati. Vasil was very hungry and asked for some food. Given a choice he asked for fried red peppers. While riding through Posdivishcha, he had noticed a bunch of red peppers hanging on the windowsill of a house. As his hunger grew, the image of peppers remained in his mind. The good people of Posdivishcha obliged and fried some peppers with feta cheese for him. When he finished his meal, he was put on a stretcher and carried by a team of six field medics from Posdivishcha to the field hospital in Kolomnati. From their conversations, Vasil concluded that all the women were Macedonian. Two pairs of women carried the stretcher and the third pair was relief. Vasil was a big man, over six feet tall, a burden for four women to carry at the best of times. For most of the trip, he kept to himself as the women conversed and complained about his weight. Their tranquility, however, was broken when the roar of a bomber came from above. Suddenly, Vasil was dropped to the ground flat on his back in the middle of the road as the women scurried for cover. When the danger passed, the women came back and asked Vasil if he was all right. Vasil did not appreciate how he had been treated and kept to himself saying nothing. Thinking that he was Greek and didn't understand Macedonian, the women continued their chat and complaint until they reached the bottom of a hill. They were already tired and now had to carry him uphill on narrow footpaths. Being upset, they started the climb with Vasil upside down, his head lower than his feet. The constant jolting and blood pressure from being carried that way caused Vasil severe pain and headaches. The women were struggling as they continued the climb. One of them suggested that they toss Vasil down a ravine and leave him there to die. Surely he was not worth the effort? Another objected and scolded the first for having such thoughts. "What if he was your husband or brother, would you still do that?" she asked. Vasil was in too much pain to listen to the moral dilemma or care about what happened to him. When they finally arrived, a familiar face greeted Vasil. It was Rina Bogleva from Oshchima. Rina told Vasil that his sister Sevda was also there. When Vasil asked for her, Rina ran through the camp looking for her to give her the news. Hearing that her brother was in the camp, Sevda, was thrilled and ran back as quickly as possible asking people on the way, "Where is my brother, where is my brother?" One of the women who carried Vasil heard her and answered, "Here is your brother you silly woman, you call everyone your brother." But after a hug, tears, and a long conversation in Macedonian, the woman was convinced Vasil was Sevda's real brother and the women apologized for their behavior. While in the hospital, Sevda cared for Vasil until his wounds healed.

Vasil was summoned to Gramos once again and from there (after the defeat of the Partisans) he left for Albania (Burely camp) to escape capture. In his career as a Partisan, Vasil experienced much combat and was wounded four times, with twelve entry wounds. It was August 26th, 1949 when Vasil saw his homeland for the last time. With an uncertain future he boarded the ship, Vladivostok, at the port of Durresi in Albania and headed for Russia. From there he was sent via train to Tashkent in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

On April 12th, 1950 Vasil married Sofia from the village Trnava. Vasil met Sofia for the first time in 1948 at Gramos and again in Albania. Sofia was also drafted by the Partisans and served from 1947 to 1949. Initially she was sent to Gramos for training and was taught to use a rifle. After that she was sent to school to train for communications (telephone). Then she was sent on combat missions first to Voden and later to Lerin where she fought the final battle of the civil war. Sofia also escaped to Albania to avoid capture and was sent to Tashkent.

In Tashkent, Vasil and Sofia found jobs in a textile factory where Vasil worked as a cotton loader and Sofia as a painter of cotton combine equipment. In 1951, Vasil was accepted into the military academy and after 38 months, graduated as an artillery officer equivalent to 1st Lieutenant. After graduation in 1953, Vasil went back to work in the textile factory for another year and a half. For the next eleven years before coming to Toronto, Vasil worked as an insulation worker, producing roofing shingles, and insulating hot water pipes and boilers.

Sofia continued to work in the textile factory until the birth of her first son Vasia in 1952. She spent the next five years at home with Vasia. After that, she worked in construction for a while and later in a leather factory assembling wallets and purses. Her second son Alexander was born in 1962.

On November 17th, 1965 Vasil, Sofia, Vasia, and Alexander permanently left Tashkent, destined for Toronto, Canada, which remains their home today.

Nikola (son of Risto and Sofia)

Nikola, the fifth child of Risto and Sofia, was born in the village Oshchima on September 20th, 1927 and currently lives in Toronto, Canada.

Nikola started elementary school one year later than expected and also failed a grade for missing too many classes. Nikola was experiencing eye problems and required surgery which took him away from school for a prolonged period of time. The outbreak of the Greek-Italian war on October 28th, 1940 forced all schools to close thus ending Nikola's elementary education at grade four.

As a young boy Nikola was expected to work on the homestead sheep and cow herding and cutting shouma (oak branches with dried leaves) to feed the livestock in winter. When younger brother Alexander came of age, he took over the herding duties, promoting Nikola to other jobs such as plowing the fields, scything grass, harvesting grain, etc., and helping his older brothers Lazo and Vasil with farm chores. Lazo, Risto and Sofia's second child, was born in 1921 in the village Oshchima, and died in 1943 from appendicitis at age twenty-two. For a brief period Lazo traveled on his own to Serres seeking work and built bunkers for the Greek army for a living.

In 1942, Lazo met and married Mitra Trendovksa from the village Zhelevo. Their marriage was a grand affair that included music, drums, and a caravan of horses. Lazo's bride was received and delivered to him on horseback in accordance with age-old customs.

Lazo was one of the first from Oshchima, and the first from the Stefou family, to make contact with the Partisans. He and Mito Tupurkovski left the village under cover of darkness, found the Partisans, and signed up as volunteers. Tragically, very soon afterwards Lazo became very ill. There was no doctor to examine him and his condition was not taken seriously. He was told to put hot compresses on to ease his pain, which unfortunately, caused his condition to worsen. He was taken to Lerin to see a doctor but by then his appendix had burst and he died soon after. Lazo's body was brought back to Oshchima, and buried in the Oshchima cemetery. His father planted a pine tree near his grave and until 1966 it was the only pine tree growing there. It is unfortunate that Lazo died young, leaving no descendants. From what we are told by those who knew him, Lazo was a proud and hard working individual.

With the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war and later the German invasion (April 6th, 1941) Partisans became active in the region. Later (1943) as Partisan activities intensified they drew assistance from the local population. Like many boys and girls his age, Nikola too was drawn by the movement and joined voluntarily. Because of his young age his activities were confined to his village and the surrounding area. His main responsibilities were to courier messages and smuggle people through the German lines when required.

Nikola recalls one occasion when, while walking through the fields near a German camp, he overheard two men speaking Greek. He immediately inquired and found out that they were prisoners and willing candidates to escape. After discussing the escape plan, Nikola gave them instructions to meet him at a specified time and place, after dark. To his amazement, when he arrived he met twenty-seven men waiting. Nikola smuggled them through the village and into the mountains where he surrendered them to the Partisans, who took them to safety.

On another occasion, Nikola recalls being dispatched to warn the Macedonian Partisans of an enemy attack from the Greek Partisans. While on their way to work cutting shouma, Nikola and his friend, Lazo Raikovski, met Tsane Argirov, another Oshchimian, who had spotted the enemy forces advancing towards Prespa. Tsane immediately dispatched Nikola and Lazo to Rambli to warn the Partisans.

With torbi (food sacks) over their shoulders and axes in their hands, Nikola and Lazo rushed to Rambli bypassing Puply to avoid the Greek police and met Voivoda Mito Tupurkovski, another Oshchimian, to whom they delivered the bad news. On Mito's command the brigade immediately assembled and left for Dupeni where it set up defensive positions. The next day the brigade split into two groups and left

Dupeni. Nikola and Lazo traveled with one group to Ljubojno. There, Mito asked Nikola and Lazo to take up arms and join his brigade to fight. They, however, declined and left for home after staying three days in Ljubojno. When the enemy patrols saw them with axes in hand and food bags over their shoulders they let them pass, thinking they were coming back from work and Nikola and Lazo arrived home safely. Nikola's career as a Partisan ended on April 17th, 1947. On this day, a Greek army patrol arrived in Oshchima and assembled the village. The officer in charge read names from a list, ordering the individuals who had been called to immediately report to the main road for further instructions. Fourteen men answered the call and reported to the main road as ordered; Nikola was one of them. Once assembled they were ordered to lie face down. After a long wait they were loaded at gunpoint on trucks and sent to a lockup in Lerin. The men were told nothing about their detainment.

While this was going on in Oshchima, men from other villages were also rounded up and marched to the Lerin prisons. In Lerin the men were kept in prison under armed guard for 105 days. As prisoners, they were forced to work without compensation or food, building bunkers and barbed wire fences for the Greek army.

After a long stay, the prisoners, their families, and the community protested to the authorities demanding to know why these men were imprisoned. As a result of the protests, charges were laid accusing the men of being "a danger to the security of the Greek State". No reason was disclosed as to how or why they were a danger.

Without a trial, all fourteen men from Oshchima were sent to the arid Greek Island concentration camps, imprisoned for an undisclosed time. From Lerin they were sent to Solun where they spent two days in prison. They were then grouped with men from other regions and shipped to the various concentration camps.

Nikola's first destination was Aistrati (Agios Estratios) located in the center of the Aegean Sea. The Aistrati camp of 12,000 was a city of tents surrounded by barbed wire. It was overcrowded, lacked proper facilities, and the basic necessities for human survival. Living conditions were so bad that the prisoners demanded improvements and protested to the United Nations. Finally, the barbed wire was removed but not before 300 of them, Nikola included, were isolated and relocated to a nearby valley. The prisoners were left to fend for themselves and allowed to grow food in gardens within the camp. They were also allowed to work for pay in the local markets but only during the day.

To survive, the captives organized themselves into work groups and pooled their resources to purchase provisions, carry out work projects, learn skills, cook food, etc. The camp was under guard at all times and mobility was restricted, even within the campgrounds. Captives were constantly harassed, beaten, tortured, and humiliated by the prison guards and camp authorities.

In February 1949 all prisoners under the age of 32 were separated, from this and other camps, and shipped to a military camp in Makroniso. This was Nikola's second destination. There he and about 600 other young men from his camp became part of the 1st battalion. The living conditions in Makroniso were far worse than in Aistrati. The captives were under constant control, agitated, abused, beaten, starved, and humiliated. Authorities had orders to break their spirit. Those who did break down were forced to sign declarations, renouncing their beliefs and socialist ideals, as well as pledge loyalty to the Greek authorities, the same authorities who imprisoned, beat them, and made their lives miserable. Those who survived occupied themselves by taking on jobs available in the local economy. The captives organized themselves by skill and offered their services in rotation as required. This carried on for a while until all the camps were almost empty. Nikola was last to leave his camp.

In 1950 all remaining captives from Makroniso (about 50) were rounded up, tied in pairs under armed guard and shipped out to the port of Lavrion located on the mainland near Athens. There the prisoners were left tied up for two days without food or water. After that they were driven to the port of Piraeus and shipped to Crete to a place called Souda near Khania. This was Nikola's third destination.

In Souda the captives were unloaded and taken to the local jail for the night and released the next day. After spending two days hungry roaming the streets, a passing woman inquired about them. It turned out that she was from Lerin and was sympathetic to their plight. Her husband happened to be one of the camp administrators and she prompted him to act immediately. As a result of the woman's intervention the men

were given provisions, cooking utensils, and some freedom to fend for themselves. Also, the local population in the area took pity on them and occasionally made donations.

For the most part the men occupied themselves by providing free or cheap labour to the local economy but this did not last too long and the group was split again sending 12 captives, including Nikola, to Iracleo, Crete. There the authorities split the individuals between the farmers to provide free labour for them. After a few weeks of hard labour, digging ditches, Nikola left the farm and joined four other men. Free from the farmers, the men took on odd jobs in the community and pooled their resources to purchase provisions and rented a rundown barn for living space.

By this time Nikola was getting anxious to go home and began to vigorously inquire as to why he was still there. Unfortunately, all his inquiries, including those to the local and Lerin authorities, were ignored until he decided to petition the Ministry of the Interior. Unexpectedly the Ministry replied and asked him for letters of character reference, which he promptly provided. After that, in spite of protests by local and Lerin authorities, Nikola was released and immediately left for home.

On January 17th, 1952, Nikola arrived in Oshchima penniless and without any material possessions. The meager possessions he had while in prison he donated to his friends left behind in Iracleo. At home he found nothing. His father's house was empty, devoid of all possessions. His father's carpentry tools were also gone. Luckily, Oshchima had good people and some of his neighbours, like Pasoitsa Toleichina, gave him what little they had to help him get by. Pasoitsa gave him a velentse (a heavy wool blanket) to keep him warm during the cold winter nights. For a while, Nikola took on odd jobs helping out here and there until he was able to build up some of life's necessities.

A year or so after coming home, Nikola met Sofia from Zhelevo. Sofia was born on August 4th, 1933 and remained in her village all throughout the Greek Civil War. Nikola and Sofia were married on June 15th, 1952.

As a child Sofia completed grades 1,3, and 5, missing grades 2 and 4 due to the war situation prior to the permanent closing of schools. Being the only female child in the household, her duties included cooking, washing, making bread, feeding the livestock, gathering wood, etc. After the German invasion, Sofia's mother became sick and bedridden until her death in 1948. Because Sofia had to take care of her mother she was unable to leave with the refugee children during the 1948 exodus. As for the rest of her family: her two older brothers joined the Partisans, her younger brother left with the refugee children, and her father was drafted by the Partisans for 11 months to work in Albania. Sofia was left at home alone to care for her ailing mother.

Sofia was also poor and offered very little in terms of a dowry. After their marriage, both Nikola and Sofia worked at odd jobs to make ends meet. Nikola managed to buy back some of his father's land and property and, with some help from his neighbours and friends, he was able to cultivate some of the fields. In time, with some money borrowed and some earned from selling crops, Nikola purchased his own pair of oxen and the equipment he needed to plow his fields. All that hard work, unfortunately, did not amount to much. Potatoes and beans yielded very little money and most of the earnings went to pay debts. To make things worse, at about this time, Nikola's personal identification papers were confiscated by the Greek police which left him under house arrest and limited his mobility to a 30-kilometre radius from his home. He was still considered a "danger to society".

From the moment Nikola arrived in Oshchima, he was under surveillance and harassed by the police. He required permission to travel, even to see a doctor. Nikola recalls one time he needed medical attention and broke the rules by exceeding the 30-kilometre limit in order to go to the police station and obtain permission to travel. The police chief was furious but Nikola asked him what choice he had, it was obvious he needed medical attention. The policeman told him he could have died instead and his problems would have been solved.

In spite of all obstacles, Nikola and Sofia continued to work hard and improved their living conditions. Nikola traded one of his oxen and purchased 10 sheep. Later he purchased another 20, 10 with his own money and 10 with money he borrowed from Vasil Stilianov. By 1959, with the addition of the newborn lambs, Nikola increased the number of sheep to a moderate flock. Also in 1959, Nikola brought his mother Sofia home from Poland. Sofia left home during the refugee mass exodus in the fall of 1949.

With hard work and the sale of wool, milk, lambs, and crops, Nikola's economic situation gradually improved. In time he rebuilt his home and tried his luck at running a butcher shop, once in Kostour and again in Lerin. Running a butcher shop was difficult and did not work out for Nikola so once again he returned to farming and sheep herding. Prosperity unfortunately did not improve living conditions and life in the village remained harsh. The political situation had somewhat improved but was far from ideal. With the birth of his son Risto on June 11, 1953, daughter Katina, August 14, 1957, and younger son Lazo, August 30, 1965, Nikola saw no future for his children in Oshchima. There was always the stigma of being Macedonian, with very little hope of being anything more than farmers in Greece. Education for most Macedonians ended at grade six regardless of academic abilities.

In 1964, Alexander, Nikola's youngest brother came to Oshchima from Toronto for a visit and witnessed his brother's dismal situation first hand. Soon after Alexander's visit, Nikola decided it was time to leave Oshchima and immigrate to Canada. His mother Sofia left first, followed by Nikola and then his family. Nikola, the last Stefou to live in Oshchima, left his ancestral home for the final time and arrived in Toronto on November 29, 1965. A year later, on October 2, 1966 his family arrived to join him.

Alexander (son of Risto and Sofia)

Alexander, the seventh child of Risto and Sofia was born in the village Oshchima on September 11th, 1935, and currently lives in Erin, Ontario, Canada. As a child, Alexander did not attend grade school due to the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war in October 1940.

Since age five and for most of his childhood, Alexander worked at home, tending to the livestock, helping out with farm chores, and delivering food to other family members working in the fields. This lasted for about five years when, at age ten, with his father Risto not well, Lazo's death, Vasil's departure with the Partisans, and Nikola's dispatch to the Greek concentration camps, Alexander, being the eldest capable male at home, became head of the household. Alexander recalls preparing the team of oxen and ploughing the fields, while Risto planted the seeds. This continued about three years when, as fate would have it, the Greek civil war broke out.

In 1948, to save the children from the Greek bombs, mothers were asked to voluntarily send them to neighbouring countries away from the conflict. At age thirteen, Alexander joined the refugee children and departed for Yugoslavia. There, children were regrouped and separated again. Some, including Alexander, ended up in Romania. Alexander attended school there for a short time and among other things, learned the Macedonian alphabet.

As the civil war intensified, the Partisans began to experience shortages of new recruits. Alexander recalls the camps in Romania being regrouped and young men and women being drafted. Prior to Alexander's departure, two new groups of recruits were formed and sent for military training. Alexander volunteered and joined a third group, which left for Rudary, Prespa via Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Upon arrival, Alexander was sent to Shtrkovo, a nearby village in Prespa, for about a month of military training and preparation for combat. Alexander spent parts of March and April performing military exercises and learning to operate weapons. Word came that many young fighters from the earlier groups were killed in battle. It was a disaster. There was a loud outcry by the community with parents demonstrating, objecting to the draft. At the same time, Alexander requested permission to go home and visit his family. The plan for sending youth to battle was revoked and many were sent back to refugee camps. Alexander was granted permission to go home.

From April to August 1949, Alexander resumed his duties at home looking after the household, the family farm, and tending the sheep. Then in August, as opposing forces in the civil war began to advance towards the villages, Alexander, along with his mother and father, joined the exodus of refugees and left for Albania. They left Oshchima and went to Drenovo, Prespa where they regrouped with others and were dispatched to Albania. In the Albanian camps, refugees were once again regrouped in accordance with requirements of the hosting countries and shipped out to places all over the Eastern Block. Luckily, Alexander was allowed to remain with his mother and father as they were shipped to Poland. The various

groups of refugees were transported to the Adriatic port of Durrresi, loaded on cargo ships and smuggled out to their destinations.

Alexander recalls, after an arduous trip, arriving at camp Mendigudje where the refugees were given clean clothes and treated for lice. There he spent several months in quarantine and for the first time met his future wife, Eva Ribarova from Vmbel. After quarantine, he and other refugees were sent to Zgorzelec for relocation. At this time, the adult refugees were given one year's vacation to relax and recover from their ordeal before they joined the workforce. The youth were sent to school where Alexander, at age fourteen, began his schooling, learning Macedonian, Greek, and Polish.

After completing his primary education, instead of joining the workforce, Alexander went to Legnitsa to pursue higher education. There he attended a technical school for two years and studied machine assembly and repair. After completing the program and graduating with honours, Alexander went to the city of Lodz to further his education. There he attended a four-year technical college program and studied measuring instrumentation. He graduated in the spring of 1956 and soon after, left Poland to join his sister Sevda in Toronto Canada.

While in college, Alexander courted Eva and married her in May of 1955. Eva worked during her stay in Poland until her departure for Canada.

Alexander arrived in Toronto on June 25th, 1956 without his wife and immediately began the immigration process to bring her to Canada. For most of their working lives both Eva and Alexander lived in Toronto and worked at Canada Packers. Alexander enjoys hobbies such as watch and clock repair and making quality furniture. Alexander and Eva have three daughters all born in Toronto, Sofia born on November 20th, 1958, Helen (Lena) born on July 15th, 1960, and Christina born November 3rd, 1963.

Leftera (daughter of Risto and Sofia)

Leftera, the sixth of seven children of Risto and Sofia, was born in the village Oshchima on October 15th, 1932, and currently lives in Bolton, Canada.

As a child, Leftera attended school to the third grade, before war broke out between Greece and Italy in October of 1940. For most of her childhood, Leftera worked on the Oshchima homestead fetching water from the Oreshky spring, feeding and tending to the livestock, and helping out with farm chores.

After the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war and the buildup of the Partisan movement in the region, Leftera, along with other young girls her age, was recruited to perform courier and guard duties within the confines of her village. Then, in 1947 as the Greek Civil War began to gain momentum, Leftera, along with all the other Oshchimian girls of age, was drafted by the Partisans and sent to Bukoik for military training. Some of the younger girls, including Leftera, were assigned to care for the cavalry horses and other pack animals. Initially, they were dispatched to Kolumnady to acquire the best pack animals and then were sent to deliver feed from Psodery to Smrdesh. After about two weeks of this, Leftera was sent to Rula where she met Karathimio, one of the commanders, who thought that she was too young and frail for that kind of work and re-assigned her to courier duties. Her new assignment was to transport dispatches between the command posts at Posdivishcha and Kolumnady. About three weeks later, the command posts had to relocate to Senitchko due to advances made by enemy Greek forces. Leftera, in the meantime, was sent to Bapchor where she met German, Dafina's husband, for the second and last time after he was drafted and before he was killed. The first time she met German was in Kolumnady when she was sent to acquire pack animals.

Dafina, Risto and Sofia's first child, was born in 1911 in the village Oshchima and died at age 78, in 1989. Dafina married German Filkov, also from Oshchima, in 1931 and had three sons, Ilo, Gotse, and Vasil, and two daughters, Florika and Lena. Like many other men from Oshchima, German was drafted by the Partisans and tragically, was killed in combat in 1948.

As the war escalated, Dafina was chosen by the liberation movement to assist with the evacuation of refugee children. Dafina went to Bitola and lived for a while with her brother-in-law Kole. From there she

moved to Skopje where she was reunited with her children. For most of her life in Skopje, Dafina worked in Bilka, an herbal medicine laboratory.

From Bapchor, Leftera was relocated to Breznitsa and then back to her training camp at Bukoik. There she met Odisea, a friend of the family. She asked him for and was granted a leave of absence to go home and look after the family homestead.

Leftera spent a couple of the summer months in 1948 at home after which she was recalled for duty in Zhelevo. From there she was dispatched to Puppily for re-grouping. In the fall, an all girl battalion was formed and sent to the 103rd brigade for training. For her show of courage during training, Leftera was promoted to Sergeant and assigned trainer duties and dispatched to Oshchima to train new recruits at a camp located in Tourtska Polena. When that was over, Leftera was transferred to Kolumnadi where she, along with twenty-four other girls from the 18th brigade, prepared for battle. Her first battle was fought at Sourovitch.

After Sourivitch Leftera saw much action. She recalls one episode in April of 1949 when she was returning from battle with blistered and swollen feet. She was confronted by an aerial attack but couldn't run fast and became an easy target for aerial machinegun fire. She recalls running as the airplane circled around and falling as it came about. Two of her comrades were killed that day.

Before the end of the war, Leftera was sent to Trnaa where she received a pleasant surprise. Her younger brother Alexander paid her a visit, and among other things, gave her a copy of the Macedonian alphabet and taught her how to read.

From Trnaa, Leftera was transferred to Malimady where she celebrated Easter by enjoying half an Easter egg. Eggs are customary Easter treats for Eastern Orthodox Christians. However, during the civil war, food, especially eggs, was very scarce. It was in Malimady that Leftera met, for the first time, Tanas Chachanov (Tsatsos) her future husband.

Tanas, also a Partisan, was a demolitions expert, specializing in laying mines, who at the time happened to be working with Vasil Gigerov from Oshchima. Vasil, during one of his visits, introduced Tanas to Leftera.

Tanas was born on May 5th, 1932 in the village Tiolishcha and served with the Partisans during 1948 and 1949. Initially, Tanas was sent with the refugee children but along the way he and a friend decided that they would be better off if they joined the Partisans, their intention being to join a local brigade. As they escaped, however, they were captured near Rula by a patrol from Thessally that took them to Epiros where Tanas was trained for demolitions and was sent to Vitcho and Gramos to carry out operations.

Leftera and Tanas met again at Malimady in a more casual atmosphere and got to know each other a little better. The third time was at Gramos when Tanas was sent on a risky assignment to plant mines. During this encounter Tanas gave Leftera his duffel coat for safekeeping and good luck, instructing her to keep it for herself if he did not return. Luckily, Tanas survived the assignment.

In August 1949, orders were given to abandon camp and Leftera, along with the others at Malimady, was dispatched to Albania via Smrdesh and Vambel. In Albania they were disarmed and settled in camps, with tents made of folded blankets. After they regrouped, the Partisans were again armed and dispatched to Gramos to stop the Greek Army from advancing. Leftera recalls being assigned a dirty old rifle, all soaked in grease, emitting a very unpleasant odor.

At Gramos, the Partisans endured many aerial attacks and cannon fire from approaching tanks. Many were killed during the ensuing battles. Leftera escaped by returning to Albania. On her return, she avoided going through the camps to minimize her chances of being captured. Separated from her brigade, deep in Albania, Leftera and her friend Ristana Bogleva found themselves all alone, cold, and hungry. In their search for food and shelter they came across a house with a woman and children whom they approached for some food and water. Leftera had learned some Albanian words from her father Risto and along with some sign language, was able to convey her message. Even though she was poor, the Albanian woman was kind enough to give them what little she had. Leftera and Ristana were just as poor and themselves had very little to offer. So in exchange for the food and the woman's kindness, they each gave her one of their sewing needles, a prized possession.

It was not too long after that, that Leftera and Ristana re-joined their brigade and prepared for departure abroad. Leftera recalls being shipped by train to the port of Durresi and by ship to Russia. It was a long and unpleasant trip spanning seven long days. To avoid capture by patrolling ships and by the authorities in Istanbul, the Partisans were transported in a cargo ship registered to carry planks of lumber. People were literally buried in the lumber and ordered to keep quiet, not even to cough, especially at critical places.

After arriving in Russia Leftera and Tanas, both traveling on the same ship, were transported via train to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Upon their arrival, they were placed in quarantine where they spent a month and a half.

On November 13th, 1949 Leftera married Tanas and later had two children. Dimitry (Jim) was born on July 27th, 1953 and Sofia was born on February 14th, 1959.

Both Leftera and Tanas joined the workforce in Tashkent. Leftera had two months of training and was responsible for assembling the steering truss and control mechanisms for military aircraft. Initially, Tanas was in construction, building homes for the aircraft plant workers, but was re-assigned to a job assembling the outer casing of aircraft wings. Tanas also attended two years of school to upgrade his education and language skills.

Due to lack of housing, Leftera and Tanas lived in a single room apartment, together with a Greek couple, for five years. Later, when more housing was available, they moved to a more spacious apartment.

After fifteen years of life abroad, lonely for his homeland, Tanas decided it was time to go home. On October 27th, 1965 Tanas, with his family, arrived at his old home in Tiolishcha and reclaimed his ancestral place in the village. After three years of village life, Leftera took another leap of faith and on October 26th, 1968 she arrived in Toronto, Canada where she joined her sister Sevda and brothers Vasil, Nikola, and Alexander.

Sevda, Risto and Sofia's third child, was born February 23rd, 1923 in the village Oshchima and died in Toronto, Canada November 8th, 1998.

At age seventeen, on December 23rd, 1940, Sevda married Alex Malkos, born September 20th, 1920, also from Oshchima. Alex and Sevda had two daughters, Maria born September 15th, 1941 and Florika born January 31st, 1944 and a son Risto born June 29th, 1956. Maria and Florika were born in Oshchima while Risto (Chris) was born in Toronto, Canada. Sevda's wedding was without the usual Macedonian festive celebrations. The outbreak of the Greek-Italian war made it, according to Macedonian tradition, inappropriate to have festivities while there was suffering.

Sevda was drafted by the Partisans in 1948 and was given light duties because she was the mother of a young child (Florika). She served as an assistant to the medics on the Gramos and Vicho fronts. As a field nurse Sevda was responsible for patching wounds, transporting wounded to the field hospitals, and providing moral support to those suffering.

Sevda's first child Maria, along with her uncle Alexander, left Oshchima in April 1948 with the first wave of refugee children. Maria was sent to Brailovo, in the present day Republic of Macedonia, while Alexander was sent to Romania. Florika was taken by Sevda's sister Dafina and lived in a different camp in the Republic of Macedonia. Unknown to them, the sisters lived in close proximity to one another.

After losing the final battle in 1949, the Partisans disbanded. Sevda left for Albania (Elbasan camp) where she joined her father, mother, and brother, Alexander. From there Sevda was sent to Poland.

Alex Malkos was mobilized with the Greek army after World War II ended and served to the end of the Greek Civil war, before leaving for Toronto. Alex's family had departed for Canada sometime during the conflict and made arrangements for him to join them. He arrived in Toronto in 1950 and started making arrangements to unite his family. Maria and Florika, both living in Yugoslavia, but in separate camps, met at Bela Trskva and departed for Canada. They arrived in Toronto on May 7th, 1952. Sevda remained in Poland where she worked in a restaurant until the spring of 1955 when she departed for Canada to be reunited with her family.

Ilo (son of Georgia and Lozana)

Ilo, son of Georgia and Lozana was born in the village Oshchima on May 20th, 1920. Completing grade six in the village public school, he then worked on the family lands. Ilo's father owned land but rented most of it, leaving very little for his son to do.

At age fifteen, Ilo began working on roads in unskilled labour. He independently learned to read schematic diagrams, operate transit, curve bridges and work as a surveyor in construction. Promoted to foreman in 1940 through the office in Lerin, he was sent to Kosinech and Bilishcha to a new road, as a foreman, in aid of the war on the Greek front in Albania. In 1941 Ilo was drafted to Kalamata for training in the Greek army. After a couple of months Greece surrendered to Germany under Nazi occupation. Ilo resumed work rebuilding bombed roads and bridges, employed steadily though not officially a permanent employee. His job in construction took him to many towns and villages: Lerin, Corestia, Prespas and the surrounding vicinity.

He was a young, vigorous man, committed to his work. As a result he was far too busy to settle down with a wife and watched many of his girlfriends become married with family. Finally financially secure at age 23, Ilo proposed marriage to Fania Kirovska, a young woman from Zhelevo, daughter of Petko and Ristana Kirou. Fania was born in Zhelevo on October 16th, 1923 and had completed grade six in public school as well. She helped in the family home and prepared her own dowry with the help of her mother. Ilo and Fania had a lovely traditional Macedonian wedding, a weeklong event with a live band. The ceremony took place on December 13th, 1943 - a frightening time, the harshest economic period in the region. Ilo was considered prosperous and was able to afford a lavish wedding that lasted until the large barrels of wine, and all foods were depleted. Only four months thereafter Ilo was forcibly drafted as a Partisan. It hurt him deeply to leave his new bride with the future uncertain. He was dispatched to Yugoslavia to chase the Germans. It was an intensely frightening 4 to 5 month period. Few young men chose to risk escaping from the Macedonian brigade back to their families, as Ilo did. One year later Ilo and Fania were blessed with their first daughter. Sofia was born at home on May 31st, 1945. Ilo continued to work repairing roads and bridges after the expulsion of the Germans and Italians. On February 6th, 1947 the family was blessed with a second daughter, Iana. Not long after, Ilo was drafted into the rebel war. Ilo confesses that he was very frightened of war and to this day detests guns. Ten months later he again ran, this time from the Antarte of Gramos (mountain). During this period Fania served time with the Antartes transporting the wounded and making bunkers. With baby Iana at home, Fania was not dispatched to the war front, as were women without children. Daughter Sofia was taken away to Poland at the age of 2 1/2 years. Ilo constantly thought of his family and in 1949 he was again drafted into the Greek army as a navigator (he has written his own memoirs recollecting the sorrowful history of human destruction in Koula Prespas). With the end of the Civil War, he was extremely disappointed and heartbroken upon returning to the destroyed village of Oshchima after a three- year absence. He shared a scant 10 hours with his wife and child when he was mobilized again for another 4 to 5 months at a time when his family needed him badly. Fania was evacuated from Oshchima to Zhelevo.

In the spring of 1950 Ilo located his wife and second daughter, doing their best in what had become a gypsy lifestyle. Immediately resuming employment in road construction as a foreman, he used his earnings to rebuild their home in Oshchima; repairing barns, orchards, and vines. In Zhelevo, husband and wife celebrated the birth of their third daughter Mara, born January 16th, 1951. The family returned to Oshchima after a three-year period together in Zhelevo, however Ilo was still heavily disappointed with the ruin of Oshchima, realizing there was little opportunity to grow there. He requested his employer hire him as a permanent employee so he would be able to move from the village and make a future elsewhere. After 15 years as a foreman and superintendent, his request was denied and he interpreted the answer as meaning there was no future for Slavs in Greece. He thought his daughters would have a brighter future if the family immigrated to Canada. With tears in his eyes he left his village and family, arriving solo in Toronto on November 28th, 1955.

Upon his arrival in Canada he learned that Oshchimians had been settling in Canada since the 1890s. He was happy to learn of the Benefit Society of Oshchima, established in 1907, of which he became a

member. Upon arriving in Canada his first desire was to locate his eldest daughter, Sofia. Through the Red Cross they were reunited in Toronto on June 24th, 1956! Ilo worked very hard in the Toronto construction industry and after three years he managed to purchase a large, new home (so as not to disappoint his family who were living in a large home in Macedonia). On December 17th, 1958, the entire family was reunited in Toronto, including his 82 year-old mother. She happily lived another 22 years and passed away at 104 years of age. Ilo worked as a lead hand and foreman for the following 27 years for the City of York until he retired at 65 years of age.

Fania and Ilo live happily, enjoying their time together. Their three daughters have been educated and married, raising families in blessed Canada. Ilo and Fania are happy with seven grandchildren. They have enjoyed travelling to various countries. Ilo enjoys the Seniors Club he attends. With time flying, their hearts still ache for Oshchima.

ENGAGEMENT AND WEDDING CUSTOMS

The wedding customs described here are very elaborate by today's standards but were practiced in Macedonia, particularly in the Lerin region. The customs, some of unknown origin, are old and were passed down from generation to generation.

Engagement

As practiced in many cultures, it often happened that a boy and girl fell in love but never married. Unfortunately, when it came to marriage parents had the last say. Sometimes what the parents wanted was completely opposite from what the young desired. Many Macedonian folk songs reflect this, as shown in the sample below:

"...They loved each other since childhood, But their parents in their way stood..." "...father forbids his son to marry that young lady..." "...mother forbids her daughter to marry that young man..."

In the past, before a child was eligible for marriage it was the parents' duty to choose a partner for them. After much thought and consideration a choice was always made in the best interest of the child, even if it went against the child's wishes. On the surface it seemed cruel but wisdom prevailed over feelings. A young family needed land and wealth to guarantee its survival. A partner from a respectable family was usually sought, wealth being an important factor.

On important holy days like Christmas, Easter or St. Nikolas, as the young gathered together and danced in the Village Square, it was customary for the older generation to watch for signals and body language, which helped in future matchmaking.

By the time a young man was of marrying age, his parents already had a few girls in mind. To have someone in mind was easy but to actually convince them to marry was a task worthy only of a stroinik (matchmaker). The matchmaker was usually a friend of the family who was able to keep matters of importance in confidence. Their task was to inquire, in a roundabout way, about the family's willingness to having their daughter marry. If the inquiry produced positive results a date was set for the matchmaker to meet with the girl's parents.

Upon entering the courtyard of the girl's house, the matchmaker performed the customary ritual of picking up a bunch of dry branches, placing them in the family's fireplace and poking at them until they started burning. The intention of the visit was thus revealed. After an exchange of greetings and small talk the matchmaker got down to the business of explaining the offer, on behalf of the boy's parents, while the girl's parents listened intently. After some discussion, the offer was either accepted or rejected. Acceptance led to the next step of setting a date for the parents of both parties to meet. It was customary for the meeting to take place at the girl's house. Discussions were kept confidential, especially from the boy and girl.

At the meeting, the matchmaker made the appropriate introductions and defined the purpose of the visit. The guests were cordially welcomed with the customary handshake and informal conversation before discussing business. The girl wasn't allowed to take part in the initial discussions but later, if all went well, she would get a chance to meet her future in-laws. For the moment she waited in another room. On occasions such as this, prospective brides usually invited their girlfriends to keep them company. The business of marriage could be nerve wracking for the girl, especially when discussions about one's future were conducted in secret. No one could predict the length of the meeting. It could take a long time or end at any moment. She had to be ready to do her part to impress the future in-laws. Sooner or later discussions ended and the young bride to be was called to join the group. She was expected to approach each guest in a shy manner, kiss their right hand and welcome them to her home. She was also expected to provide a gift for her fiancé, symbolizing her acceptance of him. The gift was usually a pair of socks adorned with dried basil stems and gold pieces. Then the boy's parents would present her with the traditional head kerchief. She might also be given money and other gifts. At the conclusion of the meeting a rifle was fired to signal a successful engagement. The boy's parents, along with the matchmaker, returned home to present their son with his engagement gift and celebrate their success. By the next day the entire village was buzzing with the news.

Depending on the date of the wedding, an engagement might last for many months or even years. During this time, the future in-laws stayed in close contact and exchanged gifts with each other on special occasions and holidays.

Preparing for the wedding

A few weeks before the wedding the prospective groom's parents and some of their close relatives paid a visit to the future bride's family to negotiate the marriage. According to tradition, the groom's family was expected to barter with the bride's family to purchase the bride. This wasn't an outright purchase but rather to show that there was a genuine desire to acquire the young woman as a member of the family. It's unknown how or when this tradition was started (perhaps at some point in time when there was a shortage of women) but the tradition was abandoned in the 1930's when, by modern standards, families could no longer afford to wed their sons. The bartering process was usually very serious and stressful especially when it involved large sums of money equivalent to a month's or even a year's worth of the family's entire income.

When the bartering process was over the families moved on to negotiating the gifts. The girl's parents demanded that they receive shoes for their sons, fancy belts for their daughters, shirts for themselves, and more. When everyone was satisfied, the serious atmosphere soon turned to jubilation. The last thing to do was set the wedding date, which was always on a Sunday.

Several days later, the sisters and mother of the prospective groom met with the future bride to take her measurements and outfit her with wedding garments which included a leather belt, adorned with silver buckles, and shoes.

Wedding Events - the groom

A week before the wedding day, close relatives of the boy's family brought a load of firewood to the boy's home to signal the start of the wedding ceremonies. In exchange for firewood the guests were treated to dinner.

Tuesday prior to the wedding the boy's mother and sisters, with the assistance of friends, baked batches of poupalina (round buns) for the invitations.

Wednesday, three or four boys from the neighbourhood were invited to dinner and sent to deliver the invitations. Each boy was given a sack of poupalina to deliver to a specific neighbourhood. The boys went house to house offering the residents a bun as they verbally invited them to the wedding. It was common practice in those days to invite everyone in the village.

Thursday, the groom's family sent the same boys from house to house again. This time the invitation was extended by giving everyone a sip of wine from a boukle (a wooden vessel). If the wine ran out the boys returned for a refill. In the meantime, women at the groom's house baked two special pogatchi (round loaves of bread about 18 inches in diameter), one for the bride and one for the koum (godfather). According to tradition, three women each took a sieve and sifted the flour. Upon completion, the siftings were put together and a boy, with living parents, was invited to add salt and water, then stir the mixture with a soukalo (short stick used as a rolling pin). After the ceremony was performed the women finished the baking. Several pogatchi were made depending on the requirements of the wedding. One was prepared for the groom's party to take to invite the koum.

Saturday before the wedding, the boy's parents took a pagourche with rakia (a nickel bottle filled with whiskey) and went house to house personally inviting their own relatives and closest friends. On the same day, the cooks for the wedding were hired and an ox or ram was slaughtered. While the animal was being skinned, young girls danced and sang to honour the life taken.

Saturday night a boy, with living parents, performed the first oro (dance). He led the oro with a pogatcha on his head as others joined the line. The merriment would last all night, if allowed, but the wedding day would be long so the party disbanded at midnight.

On Sunday the wedding began with guests arriving early in the morning, bringing with them an assortment of wedding gifts. Some brought a coil oil lamp, others an earthen jug for water, yet others a wine pitcher. As was traditional, all vessels were filled with something to symbolize the full and fruitful life of the newlyweds. Wine was common but not too practical for newlyweds. Jugs were often filled with wheat, rice, beans, candy, and other useful foods. While guests arrived outside, the groom was being shaven inside. According to tradition, the best man ceremoniously shaved the groom while being serenaded by dancing newlywed brides and brides to be. After his shave, the groom got up and in gratitude kissed the best man's hand and asked him to assemble a party to fetch the koum. The washwater from the groom's face was saved for a later ceremony.

The koum was king for the day and his word was law, so escorting him was an honour to be done with grace. A special wedding party, including the best man, ushers, and a bagpiper, were dispatched to the koum's house to formally escort him to the wedding. They marched to the koum's house as the bagpiper played. They greeted him with the special pogacha, wine and roasted chicken prepared earlier. The koum would graciously accept the invitation by welcoming them to his home. The bagpiper played as the koum gathered his family and joined the escort back to the groom's house. When they arrived, the groom came out to greet them. He kissed the hands of the koum, and kouma (koum's wife) and welcomed them to his wedding.

After the ceremonial greetings were over, they were off to the bride's house. Led by the bagpiper, the koum followed with the fourouglitsa (the matrimonial banner, a red fabric with a variety of colours and designs). A red apple adorned with bosiliok (basil) was impaled on top of the pole to hold the banner. The koum walked beside the kouma who carried the bride's pogacha on her head. Next came the groom riding a beautifully adorned horse. The saddle was covered with a red blanket made just for this occasion. Next to the groom's horse was the bride's horse. The groom's youngest brother led the horses. If the groom had no younger brother, another boy was given the task. The ushers followed behind and last but not least were the men and women carrying pogachi on their heads, loaves of bread in sacks, roast lamb on poles, and other foods for the wedding.

Wedding Events - the bride

A week before the wedding, the prospective bride and her friends got together to prepare gifts for the groom's family and close relatives. The gifts, usually handmade by the bride and her family included knitted socks, stockings, embroidered head kerchiefs, and shirts. The bride's mother and sisters baked pogachi, a special one to exchange with the groom and others to serve at the wedding. All through the

week the young bride wore old dresses and avoided washing her face so that she would clean herself up and look beautiful on her wedding day. This was her betrothal week.

On Sunday, the day of the wedding, guests gathered outside the bride's house patiently waiting for the groom to arrive. An egg, tied to a pole by a string, hung above the closed doors. When the groom arrived there was a commotion and the guests demanded entry. Those inside refused until someone outside shot the hanging egg off the pole. Guests bearing arms were more than happy to oblige. When the egg was knocked off, the doors were opened and the best man, ushers, and groom entered, followed by the koum. When everyone was inside a singing duel began between the female members of the bride's party on one side and the female members of the groom's on the other. In jest, the bride's party sang to the groom's party, "You are few and you are weak..." The groom's party retaliated by singing, "We are many and we are strong, for we have crossed high mountains and rough terrain to arrive..." After the singing duels were over, all attention was turned to the negotiations for the bride. The bride's people refused to let her go and demanded a fair monetary tribute in exchange. When the ushers offered a tribute, the bride's people refused it by yelling, "It is not enough." After the third try, the guestroom doors opened for all but the groom and ushers. Everyone was seated around a number of well-prepared sofri (round tables about a foot high). The koum was seated first and beside him sat the groom's father, the priest and the closest relatives of the groom. The koum was served first and to honour him the cooks brought him the customary head of a roasted lamb in a tava (roasting pan). In those days this was considered a delicacy. The women were served their dinner in a separate room. The groom and ushers remained in the courtyard, barred entry by the bride's brother who insisted on getting his share of gifts. To coax the groom into bearing some gifts, his brother-in-law untied his belt a few times, picked him up, shook him around and jokingly slapped his face. The groom finally gave in and handed over some gifts, which were usually a pair of shoes and some money.

Outside the bride's room meanwhile, the Kouma, mother-in-law, and sisters-in-law lined up waiting for her to let them in. Inside the room the bride and her girlfriends sang songs about her marriage. After gaining entry to the house, the ushers rushed in and lined up in front of the bride's door, requesting permission to enter. Initially the bride refused them so they offered her money but she still refused. Eventually one of the ushers quickly opened the door and tossed a pair of shoes inside. The bride kicked them around the room three times then put them on. The Kouma was then called in to place a veil of red cloth and a wreath on the bride's head. The wreath was made of winding grapevine stems adorned with mainly basil and a variety of flowers. Following the Kouma, the mother-in-law entered and adorned the bride's forehead with a string of gold and silver coins. She also gave her a necklace, silver chain, earrings, and other ornaments. Some of the gifts were from the sisters-in-law and other relatives of the groom's family. While this went on, the bride's girlfriends continuously serenaded her with the melodies of many wedding songs.

The bride, well adorned, was now ready to appear before the guests who had just begun to eat. The groom and the ushers were escorted to a separate room where they were served their meals. The groom was presented with a specially prepared bloud (tray) of maznik (thin sheets of pastry). With three fingers he ceremoniously broke four pieces and placed them on a dish in front of him. As dining neared completion, the groom's father-in-law or brother-in-law approached the groom and tied a knotted towel over his right shoulder. Wrapped in the knot was the bride's wedding ring. The groom kissed the presenter's hand and followed him to where the koum was sitting. After the ushers finished their meal they were escorted out of the room. The bride, accompanied by her girlfriends, was then escorted into the same room and the bride was asked to sit where the groom had sat earlier. She ate the pieces of maznik left by the groom before eating anything else. When finished dining, the bride was escorted to the room where the groom and koum were waiting. Bride and groom together bowed to the koum three times and kissed his hand. The koum lowered the bride's veil, covering her face. He then took a glass of wine, dipped a piece of bread into it, and blessed the couple by sprinkling a few drops over their heads. After being blessed, the bride kissed the koum's hand. Then she kissed the hand of her father-in-law and proceeded to each guest. Each guest's handshake was usually accompanied by a hidden personal gift of

money, which the bride deposited into a box carried by one of her bridesmaids. In the meantime the groom made his rounds, shaking and kissing the hands of the bride's relatives.

After being greeted by the bride, guests were escorted to the courtyard to witness her farewell performance to her family. The ceremony began when the bagpiper started playing. The bride's father sat on a chair and in his lap he held a pogacha, some salt, and a glass of wine. Facing his daughter, he first crossed himself (Christian Orthodox ritual) then kissed the bread and poured a little wine and salt on the ground while saying goodbye. She begged him for forgiveness as she kissed the bread and his right hand and then placed a gift (shirt) over his right shoulder. Next, the bride kissed her mother, brothers, sisters, and relatives begging them for forgiveness as she presented each with a gift, placed over their right shoulder. The gifts were usually shirts, socks, stockings, head kerchiefs, towels, etc. Farewells were a sad affair and could be a difficult part of the wedding especially if there was weeping and tears. The bride's girlfriends who echoed the bagpiper's sad melody with their sad lyrics accentuated the whole affair. Here is a sample of one of the songs: "The cherry tree is uprooting; daughter from mother and father is separating; from mother and father, from brother and sister and begs her mother to water her flowers in the garden. Also begs her girlfriends to water her flowers in the garden..."

While the bride said her goodbyes, the ushers were hard at work gathering her dowry. The bride's brother grabbed the most valuable possession, usually the trunk, and refused to give it up until he was paid. The best man made him an offer to buy it back but he refused until the price was right. The dowry was loaded on a horse; the trunk on one side and a sack filled with the bride's clothing on the other. If the sack was lighter than the trunk it was balanced with firewood. Two boys with living parents were selected, one to lead and the other to ride the horse.

When everyone and everything was ready to go the best man helped the bride get on her horse. The bride crossed herself and led the procession to the church. Along the way she bowed to everyone who came to see her. Before reaching their destination, the procession stopped at a fountain to drink water. The ushers helped the bride get off her horse as the groom jokingly offered her, palm down, a fistful of water. Maidens and newlywed girls serenaded her as she took a sip of water from the fountain. The procession resumed to the next destination, the church courtyard. Her father-in-law helped her off the horse after which she bowed to him and kissed his hand. The ushers helped the groom off his horse. The procession entered the church with the groom and bride leading, followed by the koum and kouma, father-in-law and mother-in-law, and the rest of the procession. A priest, in accordance with the rites of the church, performed the wedding ceremony. It was customary, according to Macedonian tradition to offer the newlyweds bread and wine prepared by the groom's family. The ritual where bride and groom circled a table three times was performed. After the third circle, the kouma threw wheat and candy over the couple's heads for good luck, as she wished them a prosperous life. The priest placed wreaths (symbolic crowns) on the couple's heads to symbolize their union. He exchanged the symbolic crowns, bride to groom and groom to bride three times as he chanted blessings. Guests approached and kissed the wreaths, wishing the couple a happy and fruitful marriage. The koum performed the greetings first, followed by the kouma, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law, relatives, and the rest of the guests. In return, the newlyweds kissed the hands of their guests and thanked them for the occasion. While this went on, the priest stood beside the newlyweds, holding the Holy Bible in his hand to allow the faithful to say a prayer and kiss the Good Book. A collection tray was placed on one of the tables for donations and for the family to pay the priest for performing the ceremony.

After the church ceremony, the bride and groom mounted their horses and led their guests to their new home, which could be a brand new house or the houses of either family. Traditionally, the bride and groom lived with the groom's family until the young couple could afford a house of their own. In the courtyard, upon her arrival, the groom's father tossed coins and candy over the bride's head. Children happily dashed, competing with each other to collect them. Helped by her father-in-law, the bride dismounted her horse and walked toward the house. According to custom, she picked up some logs of firewood from the woodpile and carried them inside, placing them on the hearth. The groom joined her and they sat together for a while near the fireplace. The bride may have asked a young child aged 2 or 3 to sit on her lap. As the bride kissed the child she gave him a gift, silently wishing for children of her

own. The completion of this ceremony signaled the closing of events. Before everyone left the bride's parents and close relatives were given some wine.

During the evening, the koum and the groom's relatives began to arrive bringing with them pogachi, tepsii so mandja (stew broiled in a round pan), wine and other foods and beverages. Before the feast began, the newlyweds stood before the koum and kouma, bowed three times, kissed their hands and placed gifts over their shoulders. Then they did the same with all their close relatives and the bride, in return, received money.

After the festivities were over the guests began to depart. Last to leave were the koum and kouma, escorted outside by the bride and groom who bowed to them three times and kissed their hands before they departed.

On Monday, the day after the wedding, the groom invited relatives from both sides of the family for dinner. Guests were offered sweet whiskey served by the groom and bride to honour the bride's virginity. After eating dinner all the guests, the groom's brothers (partstenjee) and sisters (koprinarki), wearing clothing given to them as gifts by the bride, congregated at the Village Square. The women lay blankets on the ground and placed an assortment of food and drinks on them, including appetizers, wine, and whiskey. Two young boys offered the spectators a drink from a large cauldron of wine, which they carried around on a pole. The koum led the first oro (dance) holding a banner in his left hand and a pogacha on his head, as guests lined up to join him. There could be more than one wedding in the Village Square so bands and spectators joined together to make a spectacle or competed to outdo one another.

As evening approached and festivities wound down, the koum led the oro through the streets of the village towards the groom's house. Upon entering the courtyard the bride was given an earthen jug containing the wash water from groom's shave before the wedding. As the bride walked through the house she slowly poured the water on the ground and as she entered her room she found the groom hiding behind the door. The groom gently struck her three times on the back, yanked the jug from her hand and threw it on the roof. Outside, the ushers waited for the jug to roll off the roof so that they could catch it. The koum secured the banner above the porch or on a windowsill where it would remain for the rest of the week. When it was taken down, the bride and groom would eat the apple impaled on it.

After the guests left, the koum, the groom's closest relatives, the best man and the ushers continued to party. The koum joked with the newlyweds by asking the groom to stand on a pumpkin with one leg and on a peroustia (a three-legged object made of metal) with the other to see how long he could balance, especially after a few drinks. The koum also ordered the bride to bow in front of him and the guests, to fetch water for him, etc. This was all in jest but it tested the humility of the newlyweds.

On Tuesday evening, the groom once again invited the guests from the previous night to supper. The jests and teasing intensified as the koum and kouma, as well as the groom's parents, fell prey to the pranks. But before the festivities were over they would all dance one last oro with the wedding pogatcha. The pogatcha was then broken into small pieces and some was given to each guest as they left.

Early on Wednesday morning her sisters-in-law took the bride to the water fountain or spring to fetch water for use in the house. According to tradition the bride carried a stomne (earthen jug) for water in her hand, some millet in her pocket or up her sleeves, and a coin in her mouth. She hurled some millet into the water as she circled around the spring then bowed in four directions, threw the coin into the water and then filled the jug. On her way home she poured a bit of water on the road and kissed the hand of everyone she met along the way. If the person was elderly she also bowed to them.

On the Sunday following the wedding, the bride's parents invited the couple and the in-laws for dinner, traditionally known as na parveche. The koum, best men, and other relatives did the same at their own convenience.

Poem by Edward Spero Thompson

GRANDMOTHER MACEDONIA

DEAR MACEDONIA, LAND OF MOUNTAINS,
LAND OF VILLAGES.
YOU HAVE KNOWN WARS, OCCUPATIONS,
ECCLESIASTIC STRUGGLES AND CULTURAL PILLAGES.
MOTHERLAND OF MY FATHER,
AND HIS FATHERS BEFORE HIM
BY INHERITANCE YOU ARE MY GRANDMOTHER
AND IN SPIRIT WE ARE KIN.
THOUGH MY EYES HAVE NEVER SEEN YOU,
OR MY FEET WALKED THROUGHOUT YOUR LAND,
ONE THING I PROMISE, BABA MACEDONIA,
ON YOUR SOIL I WILL STAND.

MY FATHER EMIGRATED AT FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE
FROM YOU HIS BELOVED "STARI KRAI"
TO THE NEW COUNTRY, LANGUAGE AND FORTUNE
HE WOULD HIMSELF APPLY.
THIS YOUNG MACEDONIAN OAK,
CAME TO THE LAND OF THE MAPLE TREE.
PUT DOWN DEEP ROOTS, BECAME A CANADIAN
BUT IN HEART MACEDONIAN ALWAYS HE WOULD BE.
HE TOLD OF HIS BOYHOOD IN OSHCHIMA
THE SHEEP, THE WOLVES, THE BEARS.
OF HIS FAR TRAVELLING FATHER TANAS
AND HIS MOTHER, DINA, SO LOVING AND FAIR.

HE TAUGHT ME OF THE OTTOMANS AND ILINDEN
AND OF THE KUMITA – MEN BRAVE AND BOLD.
STORIES OF THE VILLAGE LIFE.
SUMMERS, WARM AND BEAUTIFUL
WINTERS, LONG AND COLD.
HE PLAYED HIS VIOLIN SO JOYOUSLY
SUNDAY NIGHTS WITH THE BANDS.
AS THE DANCERS OF THE HORA
REINFORCED THE ESSENCE OF THE VILLAGE
BY BECOMING ONE IN HOLDING HANDS.
HIS INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER, LANGUAGE, MUSIC
AND FIERCE MACEDONIAN PRIDE.
CAUSED ME TO REALISE, THAT THOUGH I AM CANADIAN,
I AM MACEDONIAN INSIDE.

YES, THIS IS MY LAND, SO BEAUTIFUL, BOUNTIFUL
 AND CULTURALLY FREE.
 CANADIAN I AM, AND CANADIAN I AM PROUD TO BE.
 MY FATHER, SPERO, AS POET SAID,
 “REMEMBER THIS ALL YOUR LIFE.
 THE AFFECTION I HAVE FOR MACEDONIA
 IS THAT OF A MAN FOR HIS MOTHER.
 AND THE AFFECTION FOR CANADA
 IS THAT OF A MAN FOR HIS WIFE.”
 THESE WORDS HAVE STAYED WITH ME
 FROM A BOY TO NOW A MAN.
 SO I LOVE YOU, BABBA MACEDONIA,
 AS THE GRANDMOTHER YOU ARE
 FOR THIS CANADIAN IS YOUR GRANDSON
 IN TRUTH AND IN SPIRIT I AM.

EDWARD SPERO THOMPSON

Water Rights

Oshchima has two rivers (reki) running through its territory, the Zhelevska and Oshchimska Reki. Zhelevska Reka is located at the northern fringe of the village and runs east to west. Oshchimska Reka, located at the foot of the village in the west, runs south to north and empties into Zhelevska Reka at Djientsa.

Long ago Oshchimians built about a dozen irrigation ditches to deliver water to the various fields throughout the village territory and to supply the mills. The longest and most complex ditch was Gorna Doadza, located at the highest level of the village. It delivered water to most fields. The second longest was Dolna Doadza also known as Yazo. Both Doadzi got their water supply from Oshchima River.

Oshchima had three types of fields that required watering: the livagie (meadows), the olnishcha (crop fields), and the gradinie (gardens).

At the height of the summer season when rivers were low and the demand for water peaked, the village hired a Vodar (water manager) and implemented water rights. The Vodar or Vodars were responsible for planning, scheduling, monitoring and enforcing the use of water. With power to sue violators, the Vodars managed the use of water 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Watering schedules were created and people were informed when they could water. Gardens were watered most frequently and the meadows had last priority. Being the most numerous and requiring a lot of water, the crop fields were watered one after another on a continuous cycle only interrupted by the watering of the gardens. Owners were responsible for watering their own fields and absence meant loss of a turn.

Water Mills

During the prominent days, Oshchimians owned a number of water mills used to grind flour for themselves as well as people from other villages. Listed are the locations and owners of the mills;

Galik

Simo Keleshov
 Sterio Keleshov
 Vangel Keleshov
 Spiro Gigerov
 Vasil (Tsilko) Keleshov (Valeitsa)

Petkova Livada

Yane Petkov
 Kole Petkov

Djientsa

Vakovska Vodentsa

Dolni Livagie

Marko Keleshov
 Naso Keleshov

Selo

Stoyan Argirov

Old Water Mills (No longer operational past 1939)

Gigerov

Toupourkov

Distilleries (Kazani za rakia) Oshchima owned two distilleries: Vakovska (owned by the church) and Argirovska.

Water for consumption

Like many Macedonian villages, Oshchima had no indoor running water and prior to 1963 had no drinking water systems at all. Oshchimians depended on natural springs for their daily consumption of water. The closest and most famous of these was Oreshki. Young girls and old maidens alike would stroll to Oreshki to fill their stomnina (clay gallon jugs) with cool, fresh water. At home they would pour them into the stomna (a four-gallon clay jug) then go back for more.

A stomne is a round, baked clay vessel about a foot long with a three-inch base, widening to seven inches at the center and narrowing to an inch at the neck. The neck is about three inches long, at the top of which is the mouth (ousta). The stomne has a single bow-like handle. It starts an inch below the mouth and ends a little above the center of the stomne. There is a breathing hole at the highest point of the handle to allow airflow while drinking. The stomna is similar in design except that it has two symmetrical handles and no breathing hole. The top of the stomne is usually glazed and is a shade of dark blue or green. It is brightly decorated with yellow, red, green or blue flowers. The bottom of the stomne is porous and perspires slightly keeping the stomne and its contents cool. The stomna may or may not be glazed. At home the stomnina were covered with a cloth to keep dust and insects away. In the field, a plug of grass or leaves was used to prevent snakes, mice or other creatures from entering.

There were many water springs in Oshchima, some famous for keeping the water cool in summer and warm in winter. When the surface of the rivers froze, shepherds would take their flocks to one of these springs to drink. Some springs gained notoriety that stretched beyond the borders of Oshchima. Many Oshchimians who since have immigrated to Canada still romanticize about how nice it would be to have a cool, crisp drink of water from one of the springs at Slavkoa Padina, Golina, Georgoa Glava, Gomnoush, Rusoa Niva, Taragia, etc. Memories like these remind Oshchimians of some of the better qualities of life that Oshchima had to offer.

Around 1963, the Greek government commissioned a project to pipe water from the Tesna Prisoika Mountain spring. The project was successful and water was delivered to several key outdoor locations inside the residential part of Oshchima. The waterspouts are still in use today.

Earlier projects were not as successful however. One commissioned in the 1920's was intended to deliver running water to a single spout in the village-square. Unfortunately the spring was not reliable and dried up. This project was commissioned by the people of Oshchima with financial help from Oshchimians in Canada. At the time, the village lacked the funds to pipe water from a reliable spring and in haste chose the spring at Dlaboky Dol for its close proximity. Before the spring dried up the spout was relocated to Brego and was ironically named Shupuro, which in English translates to "pouring water".

Младиот Опшчинец Ристо Стефов роден на 11 Јуни 1953г. во село Опшчима, Леринско од татко Никола и Мајка Софиа доселен во Торонто, Онтарио Канада;

Благодарница

Од името на членството на редовното годишно Опшчимско собрание во Торонто за 2002-та година. Едногласно реши да му се одаде големо признание за долгогодишна безирекорна работа како член и презедател на Опшчимскиот адбор во Торонто, Онтарио, Канада. И да се ова признание запишу во книгата која ќе се печати во 2003-та година која ќе го опишува животот на Опшчимци во Торонто и пошироко.

Му се одава големо признание на младиот интузијаст и безпрехорен борец за единството на својте соселани Ошчимци како за сите Македонци во Канада и пошироко во светот.

Младиот Ристо Стефов кој е дојден во Канада како многу младо момче, али со време најде сили во себе да прерасни во голем Македонски патриот и организатор да работа за доброто на своите соселани, да ги помага со сите расположиви можни стрества, а како најмногу со духовното мздигнување.

Ристо неуморниот борец е долги години на кормилото на Ошчимци, а ќе биде уште подолги години бо иднина.

За изградбата на неговата личност покрај своите уродени способности, голема заслуга и неговите родители кои во дух го воспитувале. А не е мала и заслугата на својата сопруга Лори Фосет Стефова и своите вредни дечина кој се за секоја пофалба, оти и тие тргале по убавиот татков пат. Али нјмногу да цекажи и потенцира големата заслуга на неговата сопруга која дава огромен допринос за целокупното добро на Ошчимци а дотолку повредно е што таа жена е од Канадејско потекло односно Канадејка, али во ништо не се пазликува, нито мзостанува од другите Ошчимски жени Македонки.

И затоа сите Ошчимци и Ошчимки крајно му благодарат за сите нејзини заслуги.

Ова признание и благодарност за горе наведените ценети соселани произлегува од срцата и душите на сите Ошчимски патриоти големи и мали и крајно му благодарат. И некасе чита во новата книга со голема потчит и уважение секогаш и на секаде, нека ги потсетува постарите Ошчимци, а на помладите нека му служи како пример и патоказ во однина.

Уште едно големо сполаити.

Од името на 96-то редвно Ошчимско годишно собрание.

Април 07-2002 година, Торонто Онтарио Канада.

Мила Ошчима

Капка вода да капи, мајка шо плачи во гората пуста нема без уста.

И секоа капка срце ми вечи во мисла ме клава.

Мојта младос детицка радос, пред мене врви и помни, помни ми вели.

И помна жорни лекади со стари орачи и млади копачи.

Пред сонце угрено селото се празнеше, љугето се плнеа, песни се слушнаа а веселби седеа.

И после кога сонце на задошодеше селото се полнеше, цели си гредеме, по дома си одеме.

И сетне на вечерата близу до оџако, околу софрата, вечера се клаваше, од пото наш јадеме.

И пуља божичи и слушам тапани и водци со чупи катали да држе крестови по клашни ирзници со шул без орок на вро ружани.

Во црква одеме и после во Орешки кресто се фрлаше.

И кои го фатфаше од кукја во кукја одеше, за многу години мили сељани со здравје и живот и добар берекет госпо да подари.

И старите покраи оџако ги слушам да шепте и добра седнина на биро и добра седнина.

И помна лоши години и страшни времина, чупи и деци млади и цели во борба се најдоа по шумата вјанаа, назат, назат не се вратиа,

Во незнасна лишина коските ги остаја неме гроб да застана цвекја да му донеса цвеќа да му запаља.

Вечни памет детински другари вечни памет мили селани.

Со мислите тие со тешките мисли сонцето зајде вечера ме најде, време да бегам.

Наблиза во реката и тамо нешчо ме застана.

Во бистрата вода слушна од далечни гласиви навредени и тифко, тифко еден по еден ми веле.

Јас си Петре, јас си Јане, јас си Герман, јас си Коче, јас си Коле, јас си Иљо, јас си Леко, иас си Лазо, јас си Павле, јас си Стојан, јас си Пандо, јас си Борис, јас си Георги, јас си Ристо, јас си Гоче, јас си Трајко, јас си Пандо, јас си Борис, јас си Гјорги, јас си Трена, јас си Ристо, јас си Пасо, јас си Конда, јас си Васил, јас си Фана,...

Во незнаени лишина во тешкота борба мките наши во селото ова душите седе и чеке селчкии од чужина да вели здраво и живо од деци и жени да донеси.

Во пустото село во летите вечери кукајци куке и свето ке сиде тие се сфешчи за мртвите, една прородна дарос за загуна на младос.

Во пустото село во љутите зими, во црните темници пенџери не свете, кучиња не лас, чупи не бере,...

Во пустото село со авлии паднати без кезе ќозаци дечина не игре, врапчина не лите нема жетфари, нема орачи, нема гумнари, нема шумари, нема дрвари....

Песни не се пее шчемала сведиа во пустото село тамо памето само живи.

По сокаци, по Марена, по Голина, по Гомнуш, по Боданца, по Падиње, по пичина, по трпчина и извори тои само чека дали помочи мене ми горми пред нас да донесиш.

Насо Голичов

Children's games

Bishka – A circle was drawn on the ground and a hole was made in the center. Children with sticks around the circle attempted to knock a ball into the hole.

Preskokantsa – (similar to leap frog) children crouched on all fours. The last child jumped over each crouched child then crouched in front of the line. This continued in a circular fashion.

Shoutka – (similar to soccer) ball made of wool from grooming oxen and horses

Nogalki – (similar to stilts) walking with sticks made from tree branches

Sighny – sled made of wood

Kola – wagon made with wooden wheels

Obrach – (hoop) metal band, usually a strap from a wooden barrel, pushed by a “U” shaped wire band. The hoop was pushed on its outer rim to rotate like a wheel at walking or running speeds.

Poupi – (similar to Jacks) five stones the size of chestnuts were dropped on the ground and picked up, first one then two, three, four and finally all five at once. The stones on the ground were picked up while the play stone was thrown in the air and was caught before it fell back.

Ashik – an animal knee bone with four sides. The narrow sides were called Tsar and Vesir. The curved side protruding was called magare (donkey) while the curved side intruding (hole) was called furna (oven). Two or more could play this game. The bone was rolled and if Tsar or Vesir was up you took extra turn. If magare was up you passed and on furna you got a slap on the hand and passed.

Krientsa – hide and seek

Koutsanga – similar to hopscotch

Klendza – played with two sticks. One was 6 to 8 inch long, a quarter to a half inch in diameter, sliced at a 30 to 45 degree angle at each end. The second stick was about a yard long. The short stick was dropped to the ground and hit at one end by the player with the long stick. As the short stick jumped up in the air, the player tried to hit it a long distance. The player that hit the stick the furthest was the winner. This was a dangerous game and many children lost an eye to it.

The Oshchima School

The type of schools that we are familiar with today were not existent in Macedonia until the third quarter of the 19th century. For the most part, Macedonians, especially those living in rural areas, were illiterate all through the Ottoman occupation.

Like most small Macedonian villages, Oshchima had a single room public school and one teacher for all grades (1 to 6) simultaneously. Prior to 1960, the Ramovski house was temporarily used as a school. One of its rooms was converted into a classroom and used for teaching until a new school at Toumba was built in 1960. Before World War II and the Greek Civil War, Oshchima had a dedicated school building located at stret selo (village square). This building, due to years of neglect (wars), became unsafe and was abandoned.

The new school was heated by a potbelly stove fueled with firewood. Students were responsible for providing firewood and managing the stove, on a rotational basis. Sometimes a generous resident, usually a parent, donated some firewood. Each student was responsible for bringing a log or two of firewood from home daily. Failing to do so usually resulted in punishment.

A student was delegated the task of bringing coal embers to school from home for a week. In the morning the child filled a perforated tin can with a long wire handle, with coals from the fireplace at home and brought it to school to start the fire and warm up the classroom before classes began. Leftover wood at the end of the day was taken to the teacher's residence for his or her use.

A Young Shepherd's Journey

On occasion, shepherds had to leave their flocks of sheep in order to attend to other duties. During those times their young apprentices took over and worked the nights alone. They were brave indeed but sometimes their imagination played tricks on them as one old shepherd recalled from his young days.

“It was late summer afternoon, after milking, and as the temperature in the air cooled the sheep began to leave the shade to graze on the slopes of Chereshtnik. As the sun was setting the sheep rose higher and higher up the slopes approaching the mountain peaks bordering Zhelevo. I followed closely behind and watched my shadow grow longer and longer as the sun dropped lower and lower towards the horizon. As I peered eastward I noticed a glare from the corner of my eye. I looked and there on the upright rocks on the adjacent mountainside I saw a reflection of the sun. A stone was shining like a mirror, reflecting the sun back at me or so I tried to convince myself. As I stared at the light I imagined moving images of people in a bustling community. There were rows of glistening houses painted white. People were sitting in rows conversing and enjoying the warmth of the setting sun. I saw an old woman with a white kerchief on her head cleaning vegetables for her family's dinner. As I watched, a feeling of loneliness engulfed me. I wished I was there with them, listening to their conversations and stories, enjoying the aroma of supper cooking, and listening to the sounds of the village before it went to sleep. As I continued to watch and enjoy the fruits of my imagination, the images began to lose their beauty and slowly turned murky and distorted. I struggled to recall them but they continued to escape me, melting away, vanishing into dark shadows. I could no longer look.

I turned away for a moment and my eyes caught the bright red aura of the setting sun. That's what happened, the sun had disappeared. It had set and was hidden behind the mountains; gone, the day was over. As I looked harder and harder I could only see large shadows engulfing the mountains, swallowing

the terrain whole with everything on it. The thought of darkness gave me shivers, but not to worry soon I'd be home safe, with my family in our house illuminated by the familiar light of our faithful kerosene lamp.

As my imagination drifted further and further away, an eerie feeling came over me pulling me back, reminding me that home was the other way.

I was afraid now, my heart was pounding, everything looked dark, unfamiliar, unrecognizable, menacing. I was all alone left to the mercy of the night. Startled by footsteps rustling behind me, I quickly snapped back to reality and turned to see what it was. It was my faithful dog who had come to join me; it must be dinnertime. I had two dogs and they were both there with me.

I lowered my bag (torba) off my shoulder and took out my supper. It was bread (lep) and cheese (sirenje), as I recall. I also had food for the dogs, a baked bun of bran (groutki od tritsi) each. I was no longer afraid.”

Oshcimian Pioneers to Canada

Bozhin C. Temov, Kote L. Radev, Vasil N. Tupurkov, Risto Filkov, Georgi N. Argirov, Trpo Stoichev, Vasil S. Argirov, Risto S. Argirov, Giorgi Traikov, Nikola Tashov, Traian Djigerov, Kuzman Novachkov, Vasil Novachkov, Stefo Novachkov, Stoian K. Dimovski, Lambro Stoikov, Nasto Stoikov, Mitre Dostin, Krsto Kotev, Spiro Kotev, Spiro Filkov, Vasil Filkov, Georgi Tupurkov, Vasil Keleshov, Stavre T. Prespakov, Nikola Georgiev, Pando Dimovski, Risto I. Tsarvenkov, Kire N. Djigerov, Tase Kalkov, Risto F. Stefovski, Tanas P. Dinev, Nasto Grozdanov, Endria Grozdanov, Mitre Iovanovski Kote Iovanovski, Iote Golichov, Spiro Golichov, Vasil N. Tsafov, Iovan Radev, Risto Boglev, Kole Boglev, Kote Tashov, Iovan L. Malkov, Lazo T. Argirov, Risto Traikov, Done Ianakev, Nikola Shkembarov, Lazo Novachkov, Georgi Stoichev, Stoiche Keleshov, Tanas Radev, Marko K. Keleshov,

Oshchimians arrested on April 17th, 1947 and sent to concentration camps

Risto Boglev (Father) old man *, Krsto Boglev (son), Mito Boglev (son), Sotir Noachkov, Simo Farmakov, Lazo Dimovski, Vane Dimovski, Vane Traikov (Georgievski) sick *, Ilo Kozarov, Lambro Gigerov (Moushov), Georgi Lalov (Popov), Done Asprov, Naso Keleshov (limp) *, Ilo Argirov (Limp) *, Nikola Filev (Stefovski)

* Old, sick, and invalid given amnesty and released 1947.

Oshchimians involved in the Greek Italian war (October 28th, 1940 to April 6th, 1941)

Petre Moisiov (lost toes on one foot from frostbite), Kole Gigerov (lost toes on both feet from frostbite), Krsto Nanovski (killed in action), Petre Boglev (prisoner of war), Ilo Traikov (prisoner of war), Kosta Asprov (prisoner of war), Ilo Filkov (prisoner of war?), Sotir Noachkov, Kole Farmakov, Simo Farmakov, Risto Dimovski, Lazo Dimovski, Kole Petkov, Mito Boglev, Ilo Boglev, Mito Lalov (Popov), Simo Tsafov, Mihail Ioanovski, Stefo Raikovski, Done Asprov, Ilo Argirov, Todor Argirov, Spiro Argirov, Vasil Nanovski, Mito Toupourkovski, and Vane Georgiev (Traikov).

Drafted, trained but did not see action

Leko Malkovski, Ilo Toupourkov, Naso Karapanchev, Spiro Kozarov, Georgi Shkembarov, Spiro Argirov, Done Dimovski, Kole Mirchev, Lambro Argirov, Pndo Stefov, Vasil Gigerov, Pavle Popovski.

Rules for the draft: Fathers of 4 or more children were excused from the draft. If there were 3 or more brothers in a family, then only 2 were drafted.

OSHCHIMIANS KILLED BETWEEN 1900 - 1949

Popovski Pop – Giorgy, Tsafov Simo, Popovska Bozana, Petrou Grozda, Yankulovski Stojche, Gigerov Vasil, Yankulovski Trpo, Argirov Done, Gigerob Lambro, Argirov Giorgi, Gigerov Yane, Boglev Paso, Mladenov Mladen, Boglis Georgi, Giuvevski Ilo, Boglis Trena, Naumov Ilo, Filkov Kole, Tsafov Naum, Giorgiev Petre, Tupurkovski Vasil, Kelesis Risto, Boglev Mitre, Argirovska Luba, Ramov Vasil, Dimov Risto, Ramov Trena, Dimov Vasil, Trpcheva Sevda, Farmakovski Done, Argirov Lambro, Filkov Giorgi, Dimovska Kotejca, Yankolovski Yane, Gigerov Kote, Filkov German, Golitsov Mitre, Gigeris Pando, Golitsov Lena, Popovski Pavle, Temov Ilo, Popovski Stoyan, Nanov Krsto, Rajkov Ilo, Keleshov Lambro, Temov Trajko, Tupurkovska Sulta, Dimovska Fana, Rajkov Risto, Argirova Arhonda, Rajkov Leko, Skembaris Tanas, Rajkov Lazo, Stefov Pando.

Oshchimians who joined the Partisans in the period from 1940 - 1949

Boris Gigerov (%), Boris Shkembarov (% *), Done Argirov (*+), Done Dimovski (*), Done Farmakov (%*+), Done Georgievski (%), Done Moisirov (%*), Done Ramov (%*), Done Trajkov (*), Done Tsafov (%), Dosta Rajkovska (*), Elena Toupourkova (*), Fania Florinchina (*?), Fania Gigerova (*+), Fania Nanovska (*), File Petkovski (*), Florika Gigerova (*), Florika Tsafova (*), Gena Boglevska (*?), Georgi Argirov (*+), Georgi Boglev % * +
Georgi Filkovski (*), German Filkov (*+), Iane Iankoulov (%*+), Ilo Filkov (Kaiche) (*), Ilo Filkov (*), Ilo Keleshov (*), Ilo Kozarov (%), Ilo Raikov (%*+),
Ilo Toupourkov (%*), Ilo Trajkov (*), Kole Farmakov (%*), Kole Filkovski (%*+), Kole Tsarvenkov (*), Konda Argirova (*+), Konda Gigerova (*), Kosta Argirov (*), Lambro Argirov, (%), Lambro Kozarov (*), Lambro Mirchev (*), Lazo Dimovski (%), Leftera Golichova (*), Leftera Malkovska (*), Leftera Stefovka (*), Leko Rajkov (*+), Leko Stefovski (*), Lexo Malkovski (%), Lexo Rajkovski (na Miroulka) (*), Louba Argirova (*+), Mara Popovska (*?), Mihail Filkov (*), Mihail Ioanovski (%*), Mito Boglev (%), Mito Lalov (Popovski) (%*), Mito Moisirov (*), Mito Nanovski (%*), Naso Karapanchev (%), Naso Noachkov (%), Naso Shkembarov (*+), Nouné Tsafov (*), Olga Tsafova (*), Pando Gigerov (%*+), Pando Kozarov (* ?), Pando Stefov (*), Paso Boglev (*+), Pavle Gigerov (%*), Pavle Keleshov (* ?), Pavle Popovski (%*+), Petra Goustova (*), Petre Asprov (%*), Petre Dinev (%*), Petre Giorgievski (%*+), Petre Moisirov (*), Rina Bogleva (*), Ristana Bogleva (*), Ristana Raikovska (* ?), Risto Dimovski (%*), Risto Georgievski (*), Risto Keleshov (*+), Risto Rajkov (*+), Sandroitsa Noachkova (*+), Sevda Malkovska (*), Simo Farmakov (%), Simo Rajkov (%), Sofia Florinchina (*?), Sofia Temovska (*), Stefana Keleshova (*), Stoian Boglev (*), Stojan Popovski (%*+), Stoiche Iankoulov (%*), Stoina Golichova (*), Tanas Argirov (%), Todor Argirov (%), Traiko Nanovski (*), Traiko Rajkov (%*), Trajko Temovski (*+), Trena Argirovska (*), Trena Bogleva (*+), Vasil Dimovski (*+), Vasil Boris Gigerov (*), Vasil Gigerov (%), Vasil Stefovski (%*), Velika Dimovska (*), Vane Georgiev (Trajkov), Petra Trajkova, Stojna Georgieva (Trajkova).

% Peoples revolution

* Greek civil war

+ Killed in action or while on duty.

? Unconfirmed

Oshchimian Refugee children in Poland

Ianovski Petre, Ianovski Ianko, Noachevski Mito, Novachevski Stato, Novachevska Fana, Novachevska Lena, Filkovska Florika, Filkovska Fania, Iankoulovski Lambro, Iankoulovski Ilo, Iankoulovski Vasil, Popovski Pavle, Boglevska Sevda, Boglevska Petra, Boglevski Vasil, Boglevski Leko, Farmakovska Traianka, Farmakovski Georgi, Farmakovski Stavre, Farmakovska Florika, Farmakovska Mara, Popovski Naso, Popovski Risto, Popovski Petre, Popovski Krsto, Popovska Sevda, Popovska Sofia, Ramovski Vasil, Ramovska Sofia, Keleshovski Pando, Makovski Lazo, Asprovski Goche, Asprovska Fania, Asprovska Florika, Dzigerovska Fania, Dzigerovska Sevda, Gzigerovska Florika, Gigerovski Pande, Gzigerovska Iana, Toupourkovska Sofia, Dimovska Mahi, Dimovski Space, Dimovska Fana, Dimovska Maria, Dimovska Florika, Argirovski Giorgi, Argirovska Iordana, Filevski Teli, Giorgievska Mara, Kozarovski Sotir, Mirchevski Vasil, Mirchevski Ilo, Raikovski Done, Raikovska Fania, Raikovska Dosta, Raikovska Florika, Alexander Stefovski.

Mothers who helped the refugee children

Dafina Filkovska, Lena Bogleva, Fania Petkovska, Sofia Mircheva, Kita Keleshova, Sofia Argirovska (Na Georgi), Trena Argirovska (Na Kolia Tasea), Traianka Farmakovska, Iordana Argirovska and Sevda Popovska.

Relations

Tatko – Father, Maika – Mother, Brat – Brother, Sestra – Sister
 Striko – Uncle (father’s brother), Strina – Aunt (father’s brother’s wife)
 Vouiko – Uncle (mother’s brother), Vouina – Aunt (mother’s brother’s wife)
 Teta – Aunt (father’s sister), Tetin – Uncle (father’s sister’s husband)
 Sfeska – Aunt (mother’s sister), Tetin or Zet – Uncle (mother’s sister’s husband)
 Bratchet – Cousin (male), Bratcheda – Cousin (female)
 Sfekor – Father-in-law (father of the groom), Sfekrva – Mother-in-law (mother of the groom)
 Dedo – Father-in-law (father of the bride), Baba – Mother-in-law (mother of the bride)
 Dedo – Grandfather, Baba – Grandmother
 Deier – Brother-in-law (brother of the groom), neiesta – Sister-in-law (groom’s brother’s wife)
 Shoura – Brother-in-law (brother of the bride), neiesta – Sister-in-law (bride’s brother’s wife)
 Mnuak – Nephew, Mnuka - Niece
 Zet – Groom, Neiesta – Bride
 Pobratim – Usher in a wedding, Pobratimtsa – Bridesmaid in a wedding

Macedonian months - Makedonski izvorni mesetsi

January (Kolozheg), February (Sechko), March (Tcyrap), April (Treven), May (Kosar), June (Zhetvar), July (Zlatets), August (Zhitar), September (Grozdober), October (Listopad), November (Studen), December (Snezhnik).

Oshchimian Toponyms

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Giorgoa Glaa | 51. Esikite | 101. Stoiov Kamen |
| 2. Golina | 52. Raichoa Niva | 102. Valeitsa |
| 3. Pelior | 53. Zanoga | 103. Bagrencha |
| 4. Skapetso | 54. Boukata | 104. Osoi |
| 5. Markoa Noga | 55. Goendarnitsa | 105. Bozhin Grop |
| 6. Popov Dol | 56. Paleg | 106. Kamen Livada |
| 7. Dokimo | 57. Popov Kamen | 107. Polenie |

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 8. Velivden | 58. Markoa Voda | 108. Preoltska Osoika |
| 9. Bogoitsa | 59. Raikoi Lazartsi | 109. Preol |
| 10. Chereshnik | 60. Popoa Niva | 110. Petroa Niva |
| 11. Gorni Prisoo | 61. Stoudena Voda | 111. Lokma |
| 12. Prisoo | 62. Katin Livage | 112. Dren |
| 13. Dolni Prisoo | 63. Barof Rit | 113. Rousoa Niva |
| 14. Filkov Rit | 64. Kshche Ritche | 114. Tsrnio Kamen |
| 15. Tserikite | 65. Gine Lozinie | 115. Bodantsa |
| 16. Tsvetkoitsa | 66. Shiroka Bouka | 116. Zanoškite |
| 17. Koushchoi Nivie | 67. Gomnoush | 117. Golem Prisoi |
| 18. Raoichki Rit | 68. Slivie | 118. Belizmoto |
| 19. Strmni Livage | 69. Vakovski Orman | 119. Dolkovtsi |
| 20. Brego | 70. Sedlo | 120. Lozia |
| 21. Ramni Livage | 71. Prdlets | 121. Petkoa Livada |
| 22. Ranchi Plochi | 72. Dralas | 122. Gioupkata |
| 23. Slafkoa Padina | 73. Temia ala | 123. Raikoo Lozie |
| 24. Raoitsa | 74. Garvantsa | 124. Shtrnga |
| 25. Golem Trap | 75. Koula | 125. Dolgio Rit |
| 26. Grlentsko Trapche | 76. Zlat Osoika | 126. Padinie |
| 27. Blatoto | 77. Strmol | 127. Rejoa Padina |
| 28. Oreski | 78. Marna Livada | 128. Zmialoto |
| 29. Tsrkva | 79. Koutlishcha | 129. Taraia |
| 30. Matina Roudina | 80. Ianef Rit | 130. Kalouger Dol |
| 31. Marena | 81. Loutikata | 131. Dobroi Nivie |
| 32. Dlaboki Dol | 82. Palego | 132. Djientsa |
| 33. Mladenski Rit | 83. Garishche | 133. Nerezinie |
| 34. Grashishcha | 84. Raikoo Mitro | 134. Dolni Livage |
| 35. Galik | 85. Garishcheto | 135. Sechi Kasha |
| 36. Klouchencha | 86. Tesna Prisoika | 136. Pepelishcheto |
| 37. Sveta Petka | 87. Venetso | 137. Radeo Chereshche |
| 38. Zhelevska Reka | 88. Kalkoi Kori | |
| 39. Roudina | 89. Plochata | |
| 40. Krivoto | 90. Filipov Dol | |
| 41. Kirkoitsa | 91. Tourchka Polena | |
| 42. Oulitsa | 92. Dinches Skapets | |
| 43. Progon | 93. Kirkoi Nivie | |
| 44. Meshe Reki | 94. Kozelets | |
| 45. Todoroa Levada | 95. Stara Oshchima | |
| 46. Toumba | 96. Shoupourka | |
| 47. Tomantsa | 97. Osoikite | |
| 48. Krantela | 98. Vale Kalta | |
| 49. Sin Kamen | 99. Glozhieto | |
| 50. Ostrio Kamen | 100. Trapishchata | |

1. Chualna na Ramovtsi
2. Novoto Skolie (1955+)
3. Plemna na Golichoi
4. Plemna na Moushoi
5. Plemna na Marko Keleshov
6. Plemna na Vane Traikov
7. Plemna na Traan Gigerov
8. Stefo Noachkov
9. Plemna na Georgi Prespako
10. Naso Farmakov
11. Traan Krstov

56. Plemna na Goustoi
57. Plemna na Shkembaroi
58. Plemna na Dimovtsi
59. Plemna na Risto Kozarov
60. Plemna na Giorgi Argirov
61. Plemna na Miaile Argirov
62. Plemna na Malkovtsi
63. Risto Kozarov
64. Lazo Argirov (Tase i Stoian)
65. Kosta Argirov
66. Spiro Temovski

- Plemni ne pisani**
na Pando Filev (Stefov)
na Tanas Dinev
na Vasil Noachkov
na Stefo Noachkov
na Risto Filev (Stefov)
na Risto Boglev
na Ilo Boglev
na Nano Nanovski
na Stoina Nanovska
na Spiro Gigerov

- | | | |
|------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 12. Nikola Argirov | 67. Petkovski Kole i Iane | na Toupourkovtsi |
| 13. Florin Mirchev | 68. Nikola Temovski | na Karapanche |
| 14. Stoian Raikov | 69. German Tanevski | na Raikovtsi (plemna I kaliva) |
| 15. Lazo Goustov | 70. Nako Nanovski | na Ilitsa Ioanovska |
| 16. Traan Gigerov | 71. Stoina Nanovska | na Lazo Popov |
| 17. Plemna na Lazo Todin | 72. File Stefov | na Toleitsa popova |
| 18. Risto Raikov | 73. Tanas Dinev | na Terpotsa Popova |
| 19. Kote Raikov | 74. Risto Boglev | na Spiro i Mitre Filkov |
| 20. Tanas Raikov | 75. Lambro Boglev | na Sofia Filkova (Bozhin Grop) |
| 21. Sofia Filkoa | 76. Ilo Boglev | |
| 22. Risto Tsarvenkov | 77. Naum Boglev | |
| 23. Foteitsa Dimitrieva | 78. Kole Radev | |
| 24. Spiro i Mitre Filkov | 79. Giorgi Boglev | |
| 25. Stoiche Iankoulov | 80. Pando i Pavle Kozarov | |
| 26. Lazo Karapanche | 81. Foto Ramov | |
| 27. Krsto Moisiov Zhapkin | 82. Georgi Traikov | |
| 28. Tase Kalkov | 83. Oshchimska Kancelaria (Office 1960+) | |
| 29. Stamkoi | 84. Foto Trlev i Pando Dimovski | |
| 30. Vasil Toupourkov | 85. Miaile Traikov | |
| 31. Georgi Toupourkov | 86. Spiro Dimovski (Lazo Dimovski 1960+) | |
| 32. Kote I Mitre Ioanovski | 87. Risto Traikov | |
| 33. Vasil Tsafov | 88. Spiro Goustov | |
| 34. Gargina Koukia | 89. Papalouka | |
| 35. Ilo Ioanovski | 90. Lazo Temovski | |
| 36. Terpo Popov | 91. Petre i Done Moisiov | |
| 37. Toleitsa Popova | 92. Nounoa Kouikia | |
| 38. Vefi Koukie na Ramovtsi | 93. Doukian na Stoian Argirov (Store) | |
| 39. Risto Filev (Stefov) | 94. Vefi Oshchimska Kancelaria i Skolie | |
| 40. Stavre Prespakov | 95. Tserkva na Sfeti Nikola | |
| 41. Lazo Todin | 96. Tserkva (Manastir) na Sfeti Iliia | |
| 42. Marko Keleshov | 97. Lambro i Boris Skembarov | |
| 43. Naso Keleshov | 98. Spiro i Kole Gigerov (Moushoi) | |
| 44. Tsilko Keleshov | 99. Risto Gigerov | |
| 45. Vangel Keleshov | 100. Noachkoa Kouikia | |
| 46. Stoiche Keleshov | 101. Naunche Gigerov | |
| 47. Nikola Asprov | 102. Stoikoi Kouikie | |
| 48. Ioan Lalov | 103. Lazo Malkov | |
| 49. Done Naumov | 104. Vakovski Kazan | |
| 50. Plemna na Nikola Argirov | | |
| 51. Plemna na Moisioi | | |
| 52. Plemna na Lazo Temovski | | |
| 53. Plemna na Spiro Temovski | | |
| 54. Plemna na Naunoi | | |
| 55. Plemna na Noachkoi | | |

Oshchima Family Homes

Beaded Snake Design Pattern – Make your own Beaded Snake

Recommended colours **Substitute your own colours**

W = WHITE

B = BLACK

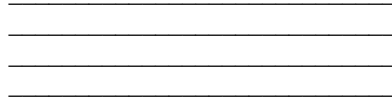
G = GREEN

Y = YELLOW

U = LIGHT BLUE

b = BLUE

D = DARK RED
 R = RED
 P = PURPLE
 V = VIOLET



SNAKE HEAD (TOP VIEW) String Beads (counter clockwise pattern)

	<u>Top of head</u>	<u>Top (snake mouth or bottom of head is strung separately)</u>
1	DBD	1D,1B,1D
2	DBD	1D,1B,1D
3	DBBBD	1D,3B,1D
4	DBBBD	1D,3B,1D
5	DBBGBBD	1D,2B,1G,2B,1D
6	DBGGBBD	1D,1B,3G,1B,1D
7	DBGYGBBD	1D,2B,1G,1Y,1G,2B,1D
8	DBGGBBD	1D,2B,3G,2B,1D
9	DBBBBGBBBBD	1D,4B,1G,4B,1D
10	DBBBBBBBBD	1D,9B,1D
11	DBBUUBUUUBBD	1D,2B,3U,1B,3U,2B,1D
12	DBBULUBBULUBBD	1D,2B,1U,1L,1U,3B,1U,1L,1U,2B,1D

	<u>Cylinder starts here</u>	<u>Bottom</u>	<u>Top</u>
13	DBBUUBBBBBUUUBBD	3W,7b,3W,	1D,2B,3U,5B,3U,2B,1D
14	BBBBBBBBBBBBBB	11W,	15B
15	BBBPPPPPPPPBBB	3W,5R,3W.	3B,9P,3B
16	BBBBBBBBBBBBBB	3W,3R,3W.	13B
17	BBPPPPPPPPBB	4W,1R,4W,	2B,9P,2B
18	BBBBBBBBBBBB	3W,1R,3W,	11B
19	BPPPPPPPPB	3W,1R,3W,	1B,9P,1B
20	BBBBBBBBBBBB	3W,1R,3W,	11B
21	bbbbbbbbbb	7W,11b	

SNAKE NECK (TOP VIEW)

1	BBBBBBBBBBBB	7W,	11B
2	BBDRBPBRDBB	7W,	2B,1D,1R,1B,1P,1B,1R,1D,2B
3	BDRBYYBRDB	7W,	1B,1D,1R,2B,1Y,2B,1R,1D,1B
4	DRPYYYYBPRD	7W,	1D,1R,1P,1B,3Y,1B,1P,1R,1D
5	BDRBYYBRDB	7W,	1B,1D,1R,2B,1Y,2B,1R,1D,1B
6	BBDRBPBRDBB	7W,	2B,1D,1R,1B,1P,1B,1R,1D,2B
7	GGGGGGGGGG	7W,	11G

SNAKE BODY (TOP VIEW) – Repeat set of three patterns 6 times

Reduce by 1W each time

1	BBBBBBBBBBBB	6W,	11B
2	BBBBBYBBBB	6W,	5B,1Y,5B
3	BBBBYYBBBB	6W,	4B,3Y,4B
4	BBYYbYYBBB	6W,	3B,2Y,1b,2Y,3B
5	BBYYbbbYYBB	6W,	2B,2Y,3b,2Y,2B
6	BBYYbPbYYBB	6W,	2B,2Y,1b,1P,1b,2Y,2B

7	BBYYbbbYYBB	6W,	2B,2Y,3b,2Y,2B
8	BBYYbYYBBB	6W,	3B,2Y,1b,2Y,3B
9	BBBYYYBBBB	6W,	4B,3Y,4B
10	BBBBYBBBBB	6W,	5B,1Y,5B
1	BBBBBBBBBB	6W,	11B
2	BBBBBRBBBB	6W,	5B,1R,5B
3	BBBBRRBBBB	6W,	4B,3R,4B
4	BBRRYRBBBB	6W,	3B,2R,1Y,2R,3B
5	BBRRYYRRBB	6W,	2B,2R,3Y,2R,2B
6	BBRRVYRRBB	6W,	2B,2R,1Y,1V,1Y,2R,2B
7	BBRRYYRRBB	6W,	2B,2R,3Y,2R,2B
8	BBRRYRBBBB	6W,	3B,2R,1Y,2R,3B
9	BBBBRRBBBB	6W,	4B,3R,4B
10	BBBBBRBBBB	6W,	5B,1R,5B
1	BBBBBBBBBB	6W,	11B
2	BBBBBGBBBB	6W,	5B,1G,5B
3	BBBBGGBBBB	6W,	4B,3G,4B
4	BBGGVGGBBB	6W,	3B,2G,1V,2G,3B
5	BBGGVVGGBB	6W,	2B,2G,3V,2G,2B
6	BBGGVYGGBB	6W,	2B,2G,1V,1Y,1V,2G,2B
7	BBGGVVGGBB	6W,	2B,2G,3V,2G,2B
8	BBGGVGGBBB	6W,	3B,2G,1V,2G,3B
9	BBBBGGBBBB	6W,	4B,3G,4B
10	BBBBBGBBBB	6W,	5B,1G,5B

The beads to crochet the snake body are strung using the above three patterns. After completing the first three patterns, repeat the process five more times. Each time reduce the “W” bead by one from 6W to 5W to 4W... to 1W. The stomach of the snake starts with six beads at the neck and ends with one at the tail. When crocheting, increase the loop by one each time the above 3 patterns are completed.

SNAKE TAIL

1	BBBBBBBBBB	11B
2	YBYBYBYBY	1Y,1B 5 TIMES + 1Y
3	BYBYBYBYBY	1B,1Y 25 TIMES
4	BYBYBYBYBY	
5	BYBYBYBYBY	
6	BYBYBYBYBY	
7	BYBYBYBYBY	
8	BYBYBYBYB	1B,1Y 22 TIMES + 1B
9	YBYBYBYBY	
10	BYBYBYBYB	
11	YBYBYBYBY	
12	BYBYBYBYB	
13	YBYBYBYB	1Y,1B 20 TIMES
14	YBYBYBYB	
15	YBYBYBYB	
16	YBYBYBYB	
17	YBYBYBYB	
18	YBYBYBY	1Y,1B 17 TIMES + 1Y
19	BYBYBYB	
20	YBYBYBY	

21	BYBYBYB	
22	YBYBYBY	
23	BYBYBY	1B,1Y 15 TIMES
24	BYBYBY	
25	BYBYBY	
26	BYBYBY	
27	BYBYBY	
28	BYBYB	1B,1Y 12 TIMES + 1B
29	YBYBY	
30	BYBYB	
31	YBYBY	
32	BYBYB	
33	YBYB	1Y,1B 20 TIMES
34	YBYB	
35	YBYB	
36	YBYB	
37	YBYB	
38	YBYB	
39	YBYB	
40	YBYB	
41	YBYB	
42	YBYB	

SNAKE HEAD (BOTTOM VIEW)

Bottom of head (String separate from snake head, body and tail)

1	DWD	1D,1W,1D
2	DWD	1D,1W,1D
3	DWWWD	1D,3W,1D
4	DWWWD	1D,3W,1D
5	DWWWWWD	1D,5W,1D
6	DWWbWWD	1D,2W,1b,2W,1D
7	DWWWbWWWD	1D,3W,1b,3W,1D
8	DWWWbWWWD	1D,3W,1b,3W,1D
9	DWWWbWWWWWD	1D,4W,1b,4W,1D
10	DWWWbbbWWWD	1D,3W,3b,3W,1D
11	DWWWbbbbWWWD	1D,3W,5b,3W,1D

SNAKE HANDLE (String separate)

YBRG 1Y,1B,1R,1G 150 TIMES (600 BEADS)

SNAKE MOUTH LOOPS (2) (string each loop separate)

YYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY 20Y

Instructions

- 1 Select the crochet thread. 50g/405m of pure cotton 20 will do for a couple of snakes.
- 2 Select the bead sizes and colours. 2mm to 2.5 mm will do as long as they are all the same size. The number and colour can be obtained from the patterns.
- 3 Select your crochet hook. Use 2.5 English as an example.

- 4 String the snake from head to tail. Starting with head, neck, body and tail. Don't forget the body repeats six times. Use a fine metal window screen wire to do the stringing. Cut about four inches of wire then bend it in half making sure the tips are even together. Twist the tips until they become one. Hook the thread at the other end and now you are ready.
- 5 Hook and thread the beads one by one according to the pattern, pushing them along to make room. When you finish a line, double check it to make sure no errors have occurred. An error can be disastrous if not caught in time.
- 6 Leave the snake's head bottom, loops, and handle for later.
- 7 You are now ready to start crocheting. Start the bottom of the tail at # 42 with a loop of four beads. Continue with four, crocheting counter clockwise until you reach # 32 then increase the loop by one. Follow the pattern backwards from right to left then up. Be sure to avoid knotting in the thread as you move the beads.
- 8 When you finish about an inch of the snake, stuff its hollow center with cotton to make it firm.
- 9 If your thread breaks or you get a knot, cut it leaving about four to five inches. Use a sewing needle and thread the loose string inside the snake's body. Do the same with the disconnected end and restart your crocheting where you left off.
- 10 When you reach the snake's head, crochet a chain of about 13stitches,for the inside of the mouth and attach it to where you will continue the beaded pattern for the head. There are no beads inside the snake's mouth.
- 11 Now string the pattern for the lower jaw of the snake's head and start crocheting by connecting at the neck and working outwards to the tip of the front jaw. Remember, crochet a chain of 13stitches for the inside of the mouth and bead the bottom. Stuff the remainder of the snake with cotton and using a sewing needle sew up the back of the mouth.
- 12 When you finish crocheting the bottom of the snake's head, string the handle and crochet it. The loops do not require crocheting. Leave about six inches of thread at each end of the handle and loops.
- 13 With a sewing needle attach the loops one at each end of the snake's mouth.
- 14 Again, using a sewing needle attach the snake handle, one side at each end of the snake's mouth.
- 15 Congratulations, you are now done.

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