

# The Greek shall inherit the earth

*GEORGE PELALDIS' teeth aren't as perfect as Anthony Quinn's, nor does he have the late actor's devilishly smooth charm or elegant dance steps.*

*But make no mistake about it; Zorba is alive and well in a village in northern Greece, his infectious joie de vivre undiminished.*

In his non-film incarnation, he's a raucous extrovert who repairs tractors in his backyard. He welcomes strangers to his house and offers them his paint-stripper-strength home-brew. He affectionately refers to his wife as the only cut of pork worthy of a charcoal barbecue (the neck). The word he uses for his garage can be loosely translated as love shack, though Vasili Kanidiadis blushes when he thinks of the dialectic word's literal meaning.

Kanidiadis lunched with "Zorba" when he took his lovingly rough-at-the-edges show Vasili's Garden on the road earlier this year. For more than three weeks, he and his long-time business partner Peter Deske overcame Greece's notoriously confusing roads and daredevil drivers to visit the little-known villages and towns of northern Greece, the country's two main cities, Thessaloniki and Athens, and the Aegean island Samos.

For Kanidiadis, returning to his ancestral homeland to make Vasili in Greece was less about opening doors to an unknown past than it was about reconnecting with the basic principles that have underpinned his gardening and food show from the very outset.

Like many Greeks who migrated to Australia, Kanidiadis' parents hailed from the countryside. But the traditions they took with them 40 or so years ago remain perfectly intact in Greece today, says Kanidiadis. "They garden in the front, they have the vegie patch at the back, they always have two or three gardens, they preserve everything, they grow everything. Everything I preach on the show, this is the prime example of where it comes from."

Apart from commercial growers, the locals never use pesticides, insecticides or even fertilisers. "They didn't know what I was talking about when I asked if they spray. The only thing they know is copper sulphate," he says, referring to Bordeaux mixture, a fungicide used on fruit and vegetables.



Vasili Kanidiadis goes back to Greece and discovers a simpler way to cook and eat. Photo: Simon Schluter

His travels were more than just an opportunity to see how the other half garden and eat, to visit the sights and discover some colourful characters, as is his wont.

It was also a chance to see how modern Greeks live and to assess the gap between the world his ancestors left behind and the one their children and grandchildren created in Australia.

For Kanidiadis, the lifestyle he saw in the villages and country towns was a sobering tonic and a pointed reminder of where contemporary Australia has lost its way.

"What I found in Greece reinforced that we're a bunch of idiots here. It's great, let's make money, but wait - we're killing ourselves doing it. It's not that we work so much, it's the products we consume.

"Life (in Greece) is simple. They don't eat much other than what they cultivate. They don't need all the technology we have.

"They live for the day. What they grow and cook gets shared with the family. They have a very free life, they are what we were 15, 20 years ago here.

"They practise what they did 200 years ago and they

are better off than we are. They have 50 bucks in the pocket each week, and they look at you and they smile. They sit you down, they feed you a banquet that can feed an army, yet they have nothing in the bank.

"And what do we do? We stick something in the microwave oven, get a couple of dips from the store because we can't be stuffed whipping up a little bit of tzatziki with some yoghurt and garlic."

He sees his television work as an opportunity to preach back-to-basic messages about food and lifestyle and to counter the marketing of fast foods and other unhealthy consumer products.

After much fanfare, Vasili's Garden had a brief run on SBS last year. But after personal and creative differences, Kanidiadis and Deske decamped from SBS and returned the show to its birthplace on community television.

The latest show was commissioned by the Greek National Tourist Organisation, which saw the show as an opportunity to promote a different side of the country. Kanidiadis says that none of the businesses profiled in the show paid any money, and that he doesn't receive a wage from making his shows.

The DVD of Vasili in Greece, as well as his first book, will go on sale next February. He is already at work on another book, and plans to follow up this show with a similar one in Italy and several Greek islands next year. His house on the city fringe is for sale, and he plans soon to relocate with his family to Greece. He describes himself and Deske as "just two Greek boys who came together with an idea and a bit of passion and that's all we are, mate, we enjoy what we do".

Neither had any television experience when they came together some 12 years ago at the behest of a Greek media organisation, which needed to fill air-time on C31 it had paid for. Kanidiadis says that whatever he and Deske learned they learned together, mostly from trial and error. The show's trademarks - the thumbs-up, "maresi" sign-off ("maresi" is Greek for "I like it") and the Zorba dance accompanied by Kanidiadis' accordion - evolved without any deliberation.

Making it up on the run is very much Vasili's Garden's signature, making it a welcome antidote to the preening and manufactured realism of contemporary TV.

With the exception of the national pastime, drinking a frappe at an outdoor cafe, an activity that can take half a day, it could be Greece's too.

Vasili in Greece screens on Sunday at 8pm on C31.

Article from the Sydney Morning Herald

## Book documents history of Phoenix's Greek community

*It was a group of hardy men and women who pioneered the Greek community in Phoenix at the turn of the 20th century. From the Sanichas brothers, Charles and Chris, the first Greeks to arrive, in 1908, to the creation of the white-domed Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral in 1983, their story hadn't been recorded until now. Arcadia Publishing recently released Greeks in Phoenix as part of its Images of America series. The book contains about 200 black-and-white historical photographs and briefly traces the community's history. It was written by the 10-member Holy Trinity Greek Historical Committee. "The book came out of what we'd collected for a historical room in the church," committee member Alex Anagnopoulos said. Part of the book's proceeds will go toward establishing the museum. Anagnopoulos and several others already had tapped friends, relatives and community members for old photographs, which they then researched. One photo is of Anagnopoulos' parents: Her father came to the United States in 1910 and served in World War I. He later married and settled in Phoenix and became a supporter of the church. Freelancer Andy Limber wrote much of the story. He also appears in one of the photos as an altar boy. He was 8 years old when he came to Phoenix from Indiana.*

*"We got an appreciation for the amount of hard work and effort it took in that time period for people coming from Greece to establish in this part of the world," Limber said. "Today's Phoenix is drastically different from the one they came to." Like many emigrants from Europe, Greeks came without money or education. What they brought with them - a good work ethic, a love of family and their Orthodox faith - stood them in good stead. "Education was a big factor - they had to learn everything all over - and learn a new language. But they kept much of the old ways," said Limber, adding that "they assimilated into American culture and American commerce." The Sanichas brothers opened confectionery stores in Phoenix. The five Georgouses brothers, who arrived in 1909, opened restaurants, shoe-shining, hat-cleaning and real-estate businesses. Constantina Gouzounis came to the country with her aunt, Aspacia Georgouses, married Pete Tamara and established the Tamaras Farm. Milton and Chrysanthé Stamatis came to Phoenix in 1917 with their four children; Stamatis was a founder of the Holy Trinity community and was its first president in 1923. With such chapters as the "Birth of the Greek Community," "Business," "Organizations, Civic Leaders and Community Events," "World Wars I and II" and "New Church," the book shares memories and stories. From its humble beginnings, the community has grown into four Greek Orthodox Church communities. "It's a labor of love," Anagnopoulos said. "We learned a lot about our community. And we wanted to leave this for our future generation."*