

## Book Nine

# Coming to America



"On April 6, 1950, our neighbors drove us to the port of Piraeus..."





## CHAPTER 1

### From Athens to NY

Yura (George) Stavraki, Shura's brother and Peter's cousin, was a physician in Ontario, Canada. He and his wife Madeleine helped Peter get to the US with the family by contacting Dr. Wendell Hughes, a prominent eye surgeon famous for his work in ophthalmic plastic surgery, who was originally from a small town in Canada where his father had been a country doctor. Dr. Hughes now lived on a huge estate on Long Island's Gold Coast. Yura and Madeleine helped the family get an affidavit of support from Hughes, which they had to renew three times, as Peter was in the Greek army and not permitted leave.

Dr. Hughes sponsored the family, and other refugees, to work as cheap labor for his household.



Yura Stavrakis came to know Wendell Hughes who was a Canadian and practicing in Canada at the time but with a large estate he was trying to develop on Long Island using cheap immigrant labor. Hughes agreed to sponsor and employ Peter and Helen although he took no financial responsibility.

That final step came from the daughter of Peter's old mentor and friend, Pivovonski whose daughter had emigrated to NY with her husband just after the Revolution and was willing to provide the necessary documents.



Yura Stavrakis, Peter's cousin, left the new Soviet Union around 1928 on a scholarship to McGill University to study medicine. In Canada he married Madeleine and moved to London, Ontario where they spent the rest of their lives.

He and Madeleine organized the paperwork for Peter's Sister Nina, her daughter Lyena and Peter's mother, Ekaterina to emigrate to Canada where they settled near Yura. They were joined a few years later by Yura's widowed mother, Olga.

Yura and Madeleine also organized the original contacts for our family to emigrate to the US.

December 6, 1949

Dr. Peter Stavraký  
38 Picrodaphnis Street  
Old Faliron  
Athens, Greece

Dear Dr. Stavraký:

I have completed the new papers, which are a duplicate of the old papers that had been sent previously with change of dates. I also got two letters from the New York Eye & Ear Infirmary, one from the Superintendent, Dr. Ruppe and one from Chief of one of the Ear Clinics, Dr. Hanley, who is a good friend of mine and who may be able to do something when you come, toward getting you some work in ear, nose and throat work. I understand your work is limited to ear, nose and throat and not eye work. We may be able to work out something for you at the New York Eye & Ear Infirmary.

It was a peculiar coincidence that the day after I received your last letter saying that the Consulate had not received the papers, that I received the entire envelope unopened with the papers enclosed that were sent to the Consulate in January 49. I tore off the front of the envelope and am enclosing it herein so that you may see the date when it was sent. It was January 31, 1949. I am sure the address seems quite definite but apparently they did not take the trouble to investigate at the Consulate. However I hope these papers arrive and that your difficulties with "red tape" will soon be over.

Let us know when you are arriving and we will look forward to seeing you and your family. I am also sponsoring another family of displaced persons which I expect will arrive in another month or so. Anything we can do to help you we will be only too glad to do. We may be able to meet you at the boat if we know when you are arriving and take you out to our house. Our youngsters are looking forward to seeing yours.

With kindest regards, I remain

Yours very sincerely,

Wendell L. Hughes, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Best wishes for  
a Merry Christmas.

Peter and Hughes exchanged difficult letters in the process of preparing all the documents. Peter knew no English so he had to get someone to translate for him. He was also in the Greek military and even though he was eventually transferred out he had to remain in the reserves and on call.

November 8th, 1949, Athens

Dear Dr. Hughes:

I haste to inform you that a few days ago I was released from the Army. This gives me a chance now to realize my old dream to emigrate to the United States.

Excuse me, please, for my troubling you again. I hope it will be the last time. Unfortunately, the second affidavit which you kindly sent in the name of Consul General Steager on January 21, 1949, has never been received by the Consulate in Athens. As a result I am forced to disturb you once more.

Would you kindly send me new affidavit together with other relevant documents the description of which I quote below as they appear in the consular regulations:

- 1) Photostatic copy of the sponsor's latest federal income tax return, or copy certified by Collector of Internal Revenue where return was filed.
- 2) Statement from bank showing date deposit was opened, average balance and present sum.

The documents sent by you with the first affidavit, lost their time value by now. To avoid the chance of losing documents again, I would earnestly ask you to send them on to me on my home address instead of addressing them to the consulate.

I would like to reiterate that all expenses in connection with the preparation of new documents will be reimbursed to you by Dr. George W. Stavrakis as heretofore.

My wife, children and myself are in good health and we all earnestly and impatiently look forward to the early possibility of coming to the United States for the purpose of starting new life there. We are fully aware of the fact that, at least in the beginning we will have to do any kind of work there.

We sincerely hope that you will not refuse to send us all the above mentioned documents at your earliest convenience.

Thanking you in advance, I remain  
Respectfully Yours

Peter S. Stavrakis M.D.  
38 Picrodaphnis Street  
Old Faliron, Athens Greece.

Mail was not reliable and even sent from the consulate it often got lost or returned like this letter. Still, Hughes' letters were always very encouraging.

Thirty-five years of age; Greek nationality; born of Greek Orthodox parents; married with three children.

First class general education up to age 17. Studied medicine in Kiev University (Ukraine) from 1933 through 1939, receiving the degree of Doctor of Medicine.

From 1939 to 1943 employed as a doctor in different hospitals in Kiev receiving postgraduate training. From 1943 to 1946 employed as a physician in civilian hospitals in Germany as a displaced person and granted a license to practice medicine there. In 1946 went to Athens, Greece with other displaced persons under the care of UNRRA and passed examinations to practice medicine in Greece and also passed special tests to practice surgery. From February 1948 through 1949 served in the Greek National Army as an Army doctor during the civil war in Greece, and served one year as a doctor in the Hospital for Social Insurance in the city of Athens performing a considerable amount of general surgery by myself.

Entered the United States with my family for permanent residence on April 22, 1950 and shortly thereafter obtained my first United States Citizenship papers. Completed two years of rotating residency in the Wilmington General Hospital, Wilmington, Delaware, and at present am serving as a Chief Resident there.

Passed successfully the Maryland State Board Medical Examinations in June 1952, (a photostatic copy of my ratings on this examination is enclosed), and was granted a license to practice medicine and surgery in the State of Maryland.

Peter's resume as sent to Hughes.

Helen...

- 
- Hughes did not invite us from the goodness of his heart but for business.
- 

The red tape along the road to sponsorship was long and complicated. For various bureaucratic reasons, it was difficult due to the post-war turmoil in Europe and the family's location in a remote rural area of Paleo Faliro outside Athens. In addition, Peter did not know any English and must have gotten someone to help write his letters to Dr. Hughes.

Peter and Helen were also required to have a second affidavit stating that if anything happened and they could not work, Hughes would not be responsible for them. This they obtained through Peter's mentor and dear friend, the well-known surgeon, Professor Jakob Ivanovich Pivovonski, who saw them off when they left Kiev and cried knowing they would never meet again. His daughter, Nina Jakovlina Malitzki, lived in New York with her husband since 1924 and had US citizenship, and agreed to give Peter and Helen an official notarized document which stated that if they and their children could not support themselves, Hughes would not be responsible for them—the Malitzki's would. They would not become "public charges."

ORIGINAL JS UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 160173  
PETITION FOR CITIZENSHIP No. \_\_\_\_\_  
To the Honorable the U. S. District Court of Southern District of New York  
The petition of Nina Malitzky New York N.Y. hereby filed, respectfully shows:  
(1) My place of residence is 450 W. 149th St. New York N.Y. (City or town) (State)  
(2) My occupation is Housewife (3) I was born in Russ. Siberia Russia (City or town) (State) (Country)  
on February 25 1900 My race is Russian (4) I declared my intention to become a citizen of the United States on December 19 1924 in the U. S. District Court of Southern District of New York  
(5) I am married. The name of my wife or husband is Alexander we were married on September 7 1920 at Belgrade Yugoslavia; he was born at Kholm (Rubin) Russia on January 3 1884; entered the United States at New York N.Y. on June 19 1924 for permanent residence therein, and now resides at New York New York I have no children, and the name, date and place of birth, and place of residence of each of said children are as follows:  
(6) My last foreign residence was Belgrad Yugoslavia I emigrated to the United States of America from Bremen Germany My lawful entry for permanent residence in the United States was at New York N.Y. under the name of Nina Malitzky on June 20 1924 on the vessel President Harding as shown by the certificate of my arrival attached hereto.  
(7) I am not a disbeliever in or opposed to organized government or a member of or affiliated with any organization or body of persons teaching disbelief in or opposed to organized government. I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy. I am attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States and well disposed to the good order and happiness of the United States. It is my intention to become a citizen of the United States and to renounce absolutely and forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to \_\_\_\_\_  
State of Russia of whom (which) at this time I am a subject (or citizen), and it is my intention to reside permanently in the United States. (8) I am able to speak the English language. (9) I have resided continuously in the United States of America for the term of five years at least immediately preceding the date of this petition, to wit, since June 20 1924 in the County of New York this State, continuously next preceding the date of this petition, since June 20 1924, being a residence within said county at least six months next preceding the date of this petition.  
(10) I have not heretofore made petition for citizenship: Number \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ and such petition was denied by that Court for the following reasons and causes, to wit: \_\_\_\_\_ and the cause of such denial has since been cured or removed.  
Attached hereto and made a part of this, my petition for citizenship are my declaration of intention to become a citizen of the United States, certificate from the Department of Labor of my said arrival, and the affidavits of the two verifying witnesses required by law.  
Wherefore, I, your petitioner, pray that I may be admitted a citizen of the United States of America, and that my name be changed to \_\_\_\_\_  
I, your aforesaid petitioner being duly sworn, depose and say that I have read this petition and know the contents thereof; that the same is true of my own knowledge except as to matters herein stated to be alleged upon information and belief, and that as to those matters I believe it to be true; and that this petition is signed by me with my full, true name.  
FORM 2246-2-24  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR 14-2018  
NATURALIZATION SERVICE  
Nina Malitzky  
Deputy Clerk

Nina Malitzky was the daughter of Dr. Jacob Pivovonski, Peter's mentor and good friend. From the records it shows she came to the US in 1924 with her husband and they both got citizenship. She kindly provided the affidavit of support required for our family to get a visa to the US. It appears she had no children.

As Helen said,

•  
• “There was no welfare and it was forbidden to sleep in the streets. If no one  
• was responsible for you, and you were indigent, they sent you back to your  
• country of origin. There they would have hanged us...The Malitzki’s took a  
• big risk for us. It shows you what people are made of. On the affidavit was  
• written, “The hand of the one that gives never goes empty”  
•

They also had to sign a document at the American Consul in Athens where, Helen remembered, the young man said, “*We need people like you.*” They signed a statement stating that if they couldn’t support themselves, they would be deported to their country of origin. Of course, deportation would have meant imprisonment or death.

Helen’s story...

•  
• We went through a vigorous screening (at the consul). Even our feces were  
• examined for amoebas. We had to take laxatives and only the second bowel  
• movement was sampled. After that we went back home, by bus and then  
• beyond that on foot, to Picrodaphni, pale and sick with diarrhea.  
•

•  
• Finally, the sponsorship was approved. In Greece, the sponsor’s papers  
• were thoroughly checked, because so many Greeks wanted to go to the  
• US. There was one serious hitch, however; our documents said we were  
• seeking permanent residence in the US, but Peter was demobilized from the  
• Greek army but still in the reserves and he wasn’t supposed to leave Greece  
• for more than six months. Somehow the official who checked our papers  
• missed that part.  
•

•  
• The old folks were to remain. They were pretty depressed and saddened by  
• this but in the meantime, they stayed in Picrodaphni. We did not know for  
• how long. We had no way of getting papers for them and no money to pay  
• for their passage. They were completely down. Somehow they would have  
• to survive on the ramshackle homestead at picrodaphni selling eggs and  
• raising chickens. When we left we did not know how long it would take us  
• to get settled. Once we were gone there seemed to be no future for them.  
•

•  
• But as luck would have it, in the US the policy changed toward Displaced  
• Persons and they were given the right to enter (the US). They were not  
• the same status as we were and had been designated as DP or Displaced  
• Persons. We were Greek citizens they were war refugees. Most DP’s ended  
• up in camps for several years, This was not easy because the US gave  
• priority to able bodied childless young people with professional skills. Even  
•



•  
• Peter and Helen had some difficulty because they had two small children.  
• Baba Anya and Deda Vench were old, past working age, and lacked market-  
• able skills. Baba Anya's engineering degree would not go far in the US where  
• Soviet education was considered inferior. Still, by the end of 1951, Helen had  
• managed to get her parents to the US.  
•

Helen's story...

•  
• On April 6, 1950, our neighbors drove us to the port of Piraeus in a truck with  
• our numerous boxes filled with sheets, towels, and other household items  
• to board the TSS Nea Hellas, which was scheduled to sail to Hoboken, New  
• Jersey stopping at Naples, Lisbon, and Halifax. Because of Pop's reserve  
• status we were afraid they would notice that he had an immigrant visa  
• which would obviously last longer than 6 months. Had they noticed he  
• would have been stopped and sent back so we had a few tense moments  
• for a time. In fact, I had packed his clothes separately from mine and the  
• children in case he got taken off the ship.  
•



Packing all our possessions in cardboard boxes, our neighbors drove us in their truck to Piraeus to pick up the Nea Hellas which would take us to America. Helen's parents, Anna and Vasily were disoriented and sad for they would be left behind, not speaking the language and since we had no source of income, they would have to make do with the dry little piece of land raising chickens and eggs, making string bags, and rag rugs.

They had been left behind before, in Italy, and had been successfully reunited with the family but in these uncertain circumstances they were terribly disheartened as can be seen from their faces.

•  
• When we got to the ship, I took the children by the hand, took a deep breath,  
• and went through the document line. They looked at our papers. We went  
• through! Behind us walked Papa. They checked his papers. He said nothing.  
• He got through!  
•

•  
• It was not over yet though. I was afraid they could still come onboard  
• anytime and take Pop away.  
•



MANIFEST OF IN-BOUND PASSENGERS (ALIENS) 199

Class TOURIST from PIRAEUS-GREECE, APRIL, 7th, 1950

Suggested Records

ON "NDA HELLAS"

arriving at port of NEW YORK, N.Y. APR 22, 1950

(Name of vessel)

(1) (2) (3) England & Wales, Death Index

Line No.	Family Name—Given Name Destination in United States	Age (Years)	Sex (F-M)	Mar- ried or Single	Travel Doc. No. Nationality	1916-2007 England & Wales, Death Index	1916-2007 England & Wales, Death Index	1916-2007 England & Wales, Death Index
	STAVRAKIS Petros Stylianos 131 Fulton Ave., Hamstead, N.Y.	33	M	M	I-382969 Greek	London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965 Name: Petros Stavrakis	Yes	
	STAVRAKIS Eleni P. 131 Fulton Ave., Hamstead, N.Y.	32	F	M	I-382962 Greek	London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965 Name: Petros Stavrakis	Yes	
	STAVRAKIS Olga P. 131 Fulton Ave., Hamstead, N.Y.	7	F	S	I-382997 Greek	London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965 Name: Petros Stavrakis	No	EXEMPT
	STAVRAKIS Stylianos P. 131 Fulton Ave., Hamstead, N.Y.	4	M	S	I-382963 Greek	London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965 Name: Petros Stavrakis	No	EXEMPT
	WATSIOULA Eleftheria 59 Mason Str., Greenwich, Conn.	33	F	S	V-38551 Greek	all 7 suggested records	Yes	0200-270 304
	PAIOS Myrsene Andreas 610 W. 135 St., Apt. 40, New York, N.Y.	13	F	S	I-382864 Greek		Yes	1130-270 304 Petros Stavrakis

It was good that we all stayed together because Pop was seasick much of the time, lying under a thin army blanket on the lower bunk. The cabin was small and the bathroom was down a narrow corridor. A metal staircase extended up to the floor above.

Olga was almost seven and Steven four. By this time, they had lived in Greece for five years. The family spoke Russian to each other but all could speak Greek easily. From now on, however, Greek would only be spoken with friends whose first language it remained. The children would forget that language as they learned English.

Helen and Peter had a total of \$50.00 US left after they had paid for the tickets and other expenses to get to the ship. To pay the passage they had sold the few things of value they had left and one of these was a Peter's father's stamp collection of preRevolutionary empire stamps. It was not a big collection and it did not bring enough money to cover all the costs, but it helped even though they had to sell it below value.

Ship ledger showing our names, Peter, Helen, Stevie and Olga.

When the ship stopped in Naples, they spent \$15.00 to visit Pompeii, a place the older folks would never return to. It was a day trip which Helen always remembered fondly. Helen and Peter loved visiting interesting sites and in Athens, they had explored the Acropolis and several monasteries even when they barely had enough to eat.

At the dock they bought little souvenirs for the children. Olga got a little mosaic violin pin which remains in her possession although some of the tesserae have fallen out.

Olga's story...

• There were three classes of passengers on the ship, which was puzzling.  
• What was a "class"? I had no idea. Mom said some people paid more and  
• got special rooms. We had our own deck in third class separated from the  
• second class by a partition and located toward the prow. If I strained to look  
• around the partition I could just see the well dressed ladies sitting on deck  
• chairs or walking strolling along bundled in coats against the cold wind.  
• We could not see first class from our location at all.

• When Papa felt better, he took us walking on deck. It was cold and on our  
• deck there were no lounge chairs. It was a narrow small space, just big  
• enough to get some air. One day, he took Stevie and me to the railing and we  
• watched the water churn by along the hull. It was frightening to see how  
• fast the ship moved. My mother only allowed us on deck with herself or our  
• father as the railing was not particularly safe. It seemed that no one else  
• from third class ever went on deck.

• One day, Stevie took a tumble down the metal stairs. He tripped and then  
• rolled down about five of the stairs and our mother panicked. She wrapped  
• him in a blanket and carried him to the room while I helpfully pointed out  
• that he had blood in his nose. "That's not blood," she said. "That is just a  
• flower." And that was all the damage there was.

• We ate in a sparse dining room with long scratched wooden tables. There  
• was no ceremony or festivity to dinner that I remember and neither was the  
• food particularly memorable. I don't remember our life on board as being  
• particularly uncomfortable, unpleasant or boring, as it was all new and  
• exciting to me although the space allotted to us was very small.

• We were lucky with the weather for the sea was generally quite calm and  
• our father soon felt well enough to take us on short walks along the little  
• deck. Outside it was windy and cold but we wore the coats that our grand-  
• mother had made for us and the sweaters she and our mother had knitted.  
• I had a pink one with buttons decorated with flowers. Stevie's was green  
• or blue. As we crossed from Portugal to Halifax we entered cold water and  
• one day while we stood on deck with our father, he pointed out a tall white  
• plume of spray in the distance. A whale spout!

Seventeen days after embarking, the Nea Hellas approached land. Seabirds swooped overhead and the sea calmed. We passed several small islands, green with trees and covered with little houses and everyone crowded out on deck. Somehow our father managed to get us toward the prow from where we could see the approach of land. We must have gotten to first or second class for the people lined up along the railings eagerly looking for the mainland shores were well dressed.

In front of us, along the rail stood a very formally turned out family, parents and two boys, from England. Perhaps they had embarked in Halifax. They stood at the rail with their backs to us although later our parents struck up a conversation with the parents.

Our mother looked at their clothing and whether she spoke her thoughts, or I simply read them, I could see she was comparing the children's exquisitely cut grey woolen coats and stylish hats to the homemade clothing Stevie and I were wearing. I could feel her chagrin for our own sweaters and coats which were expertly tailored but clearly made from dismantled adult used clothing sent to the war camps in CARE packages. I have kept that pink sweater to this day. No English lady could possibly have made such lovely coats as ours out of the scraps and remnants our mother had to work with

The sea calmed as we sailed into the protected water of New York Bay, past the statue of Liberty and up the Hudson River to Hoboken piers, on the New Jersey side. As we sailed by Long Island and Manhattan I stared at the amazing sight. Buildings crowded together and a road along the waterfront along which cars raced one after another. No spaces between them. Just a stream of cars like a rolling river! It was an extraordinary thing I had never seen in my life. I stared at the shore in awe. I had seen one car up close and in Athens for we lived in the undeveloped raw hinterland where not even buses reached. We had visited Athens a few times and had seen the chaos of city traffic with white jacketed police officers trying to direct its flow from the center of the big intersections. But this was different. The cars followed one another in an orderly line all going the same speed. They moved fast but there was order.

Helen's story...

Finally we put our feet on the soil of this, unknown to us, country...Hoboken was a dreary place. Volodya, and either Shura and Milya or Yura, and Madeleine came.

*(Most likely it was Shura and Milya as Yura and Madeleine lived in Canada and Shura lived in Philadelphia.)*



Internet photo of immigrants arriving in New York. (Wikimedia Commons)



We docked at Hoboken on April 22, 1950, New Jersey, which is now a ferry terminal. Back then this was a port that connected to the various railroads extending westward. The port was singularly unattractive and bustling with almost chaotic activity. Somehow we got through and met our cousins, Shura and Milya. Volodya Lashkevich may have also been there, or he may have joined us later at Wenlo. (Photo credit: Hoboken Museum, 1960 photo)

.  
 . We paid them for the gas. Someone gave me a gray coat, nicely made. I had  
 . knitted and sewed things with remnants from where I worked. Socks and all.  
 . The relatives were appalled by all our junk. But they admired the children...  
 .  
 . My first impression is still vivid in my mind. On the way from the harbor to  
 . Long Island, we were driven through downtown New York City. Between  
 . overwhelmingly big buildings, falling apart shacks, and piles of garbage.  
 . In between we saw, to our horror, bodies spread out on the sidewalks.  
 . Their faces were swollen and almost expressionless. The memory of the  
 . Ukrainian starvation of 1933 was still fresh in my heart. The thought hit me  
 . like a sharp knife, Good God, did we have to come all this way to see poor  
 . people die from starvation?  
 .  
 . I asked the relatives about it. The explanation was simple. These people were  
 . just drunks. The rest of the way I sat quietly, trying to grasp and digest the vast  
 . differences between the country of my past, and the country of my present.  
 .

Helen...

.  
 . When we arrived, Shura went and talked to Hughes. We got a message that  
 . the Hughes were inviting us to join them for dinner. Shura said, "You are  
 . tired and you don't speak English, we will go in your place." I did not want  
 . to go anyway. So they went. The Hughes's met them and told them that the  
 .

• invitation was not for them. I did not know this at the time, but when they  
• returned they looked like beaten dogs.

• They are strange people, the relatives. Very strange people. They left and I  
• thought they may have been unsure about how we would suit the Hughes's.  
• But if I have to clean a bathroom, I will do it so well that you will call me a  
• second time. You learn to accept that, because many people have to lower  
• themselves at some time in their lives. I believe work is not lowering of  
• oneself. It is honorable to work.

• When I came here and saw people here, I said this is my country. There is  
• no Stalin and you have the freedom to do what you want. Of course, if you  
• get sick, or have an accident, they will throw you out into the street. That is  
• America!

The Hughes estate was in Glenwood Landing, New York on the so called “Gold Coast” of Long Island, and was called Wenlo. Helen and Peter worked as domestics, Peter doing maintenance and yard work and Helen working as a housekeeper. Helen remembered the estate with awe and certainly, after living in a hut in the Greek countryside for years, it must have seemed incredibly grand. She described it as a castle—*like Vanderbilt cottages*—with big gates and a long driveway so that the main house could not be seen from the road. *They owned several miles of beach. There were two lakes, a park, azaleas and rhododendrons.*



The Hughes had purchased the Clapham-Stern house in 1943 and converted it to a kind of rental community for upscale tenants working in New York City. Besides ourselves, there was a Hungarian refugee couple, and a couple by the name of Walt Menke. He was a VP of TWA Airlines.

Our position in the household was that of servants. Our father worked as a gardener and our mother as a domestic char woman. The terms of work remain unknown.

There were other houses on the grounds, which the Hughes' rented out. At the time, the Ambassador to the UN from Chile was living in one house, and a Vice-President of TWA Airlines, Walt Menke, stayed in another (see photos).

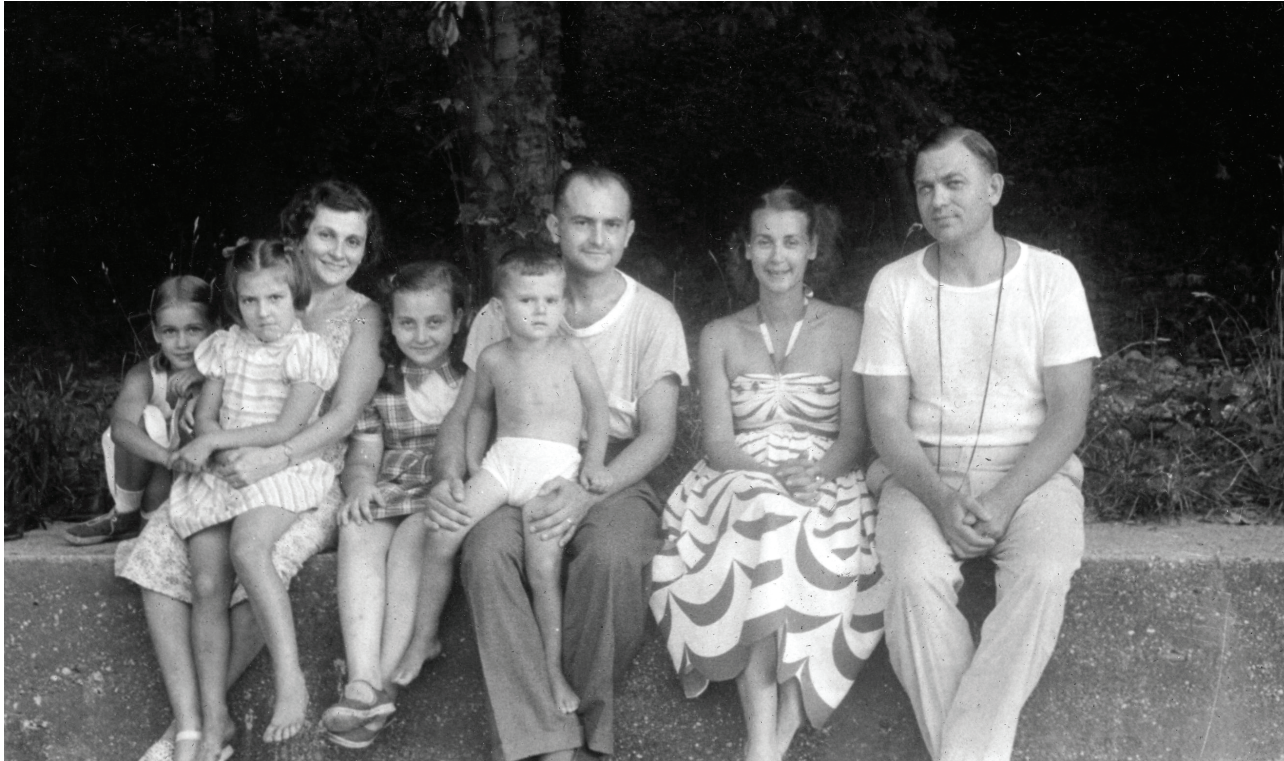


Photo taken on the bayside of the Hughes property. Left to right: Peggy Hughes, Olga, Helen, Irene Stavrakis, Stevie, Peter, Ruth and Walt Menke.

The Hughes had three children, Billy, Nancy and Peggy but only Peggy, the youngest, was the biological child, the other two being adopted. Peggy was a spoiled brat and enjoyed harassing our family and especially Olga. She spoke in the objective case, "me wants... me goes... etc." and there was little anyone could do about her constant presence.



Left to right, Stevie, Olga and Peggy Hughes. Behind on the left is Milya Stavrakis and the Menke's are on the right. This whole series of photos were taken on the Bay side of the property.



Helen described Dr. Hughes as a big, energetic man always involved in business and investing. Mrs. Hughes was a former nurse and managed his practice and the household. The Hughes had three children—Billy, Nancy, and Peggy. Billy and Nancy were older, Nancy being born in 1940 and Billy maybe either a year or two before. They had been adopted from Canada. Peggy the youngest, born probably 1942, was their biological child and Helen remembers her being cruel to Olga. None of the children were well cared for and mostly left to their own devices. One of them, possibly Billy, peed in the bed and it wasn't changed.

Also living in the household was Mrs. Hughes' mother, Sarah Rupp, according to Helen, *a miserable, angry old woman from a poor background. She followed us around to make sure we didn't steal anything.*

Olga's story...

- 
- Billy and Nancy were kind, but Peggy was "a spoiled brat" who terrorized
- her siblings, and me as well. Because she was the darling of the parents,
- there was nothing we could do. My mother simply said we had to tolerate
- her constant provocation. For some reason she stuck close to us and
- followed me around wherever I went.
- 
- 
- "...those first days were a nightmare which I remember only in disjointed
- frightening pictures. There was a big garage which had a moist and musty
- smell and several large black cars. Cars were still a curiosity for me. Until I
- first looked upon the shores of Staten Island from the ship, I had only seen
- one car up close in my entire life. It was during the British occupation. A
- British couple once drove up to our little house outside Athens in a big black
- car. They took us all for a ride up into the hills where there was a little
- restaurant nestled along the edge of a pine grove. While the adults ate and
- talked my brother and I played in the pine needles and much to our excitement
- we saw a red fox in between the trees.
- 
- 
- Now, there were two big black cars right in front of me. We were driven to
- school in one of the cars with a number of other children. I don't remember
- who they were but there were boys and girls, probably from the estate...
- 
- 
- After school, the children with whom we had come tried to lose me. They
- slammed a door in my face, laughing hysterically, and ran away. I was
- alone in a big classroom and the door handle was strange. I did not know
- how to open it. The room seemed alien and oddly lit. Nothing about it was
- familiar. I was terrified, afraid of being abandoned. I imagined they would
- all go away and leave me there in America, trapped forever. I did not even
- speak their language. Sheer terror came over me. To this day I remember
- 

### **Hughes-Beel**

Dr. and Mrs. Wendell L. Hughes of Roslyn Harbor, N. Y., have announced the engagement of his daughter, Nancy, to Alan Austen Beel, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles F. Beel of South Shore drive. A June wedding is planned. Miss Hughes was graduated from Ontario Ladies' college in Canada and also attended Chatham college in Pittsburgh. Mr. Beel was graduated from the University of Colorado and also attended Northwestern and New York universities.

Announcement for Nancy Hughes wedding to Austen Beel of Chicago. Clipped from the Chicago Tribune May 5, 1962, Page 17.

the smell of that garage on damp warm mornings when my own garage gets the same scent of decaying weeds and wet cement. Luckily, I only had to go to school there for a month.

School ended in early June and we played in the woods where they had a swing. Bill and Nancy were always on their own and Peggy constantly circled around waiting to annoy someone or disrupt a game. I don't remember where Stevie played and who took care of him and I have no memory of eating meals, preparing food, or even out living quarters.

Food had never been a major issue for us, the children. We got hungry, we were fed. In Greece it was often lentil soup and dark bread. On one festive occasion our mother made "Churstiki" of a type of dough fried in oil and sprinkled with powder sugar – a real treat and one I remembered in detail for we never really had enough oil to fry anything so this was an occasion. For Christmas she made Kourambiedes which she rationed carefully saying if we ate more than one or two at a time, we would get sick on our stomachs.

On the ship and in Long Island, food had no meaning for me and made no impression. I was not hungry and craved nothing. I had no anticipation of sweets or deserts, or fruits or anything. Food was no more significant in my life than a pair of shoes or socks.

We arrived to Long Island on August 22, 1950 and Olga was immediately enrolled in school. She had gone to school for most of the previous year in Paleo Faliro and knew no English but by the end of the first week of June she was promoted to second grade which she continued in Wilmington Delaware.

6/23/50

## Glenwood Landing School

GLENWOOD LANDING, N. Y.

Olga Stauraki

has made satisfactory achievement and is promoted to

Grade 2.

Helen Dickinson

Helen's story...

Mrs. Hughes took her along on a grocery shopping trip. Helen had no money and had no desire to go but felt it was not polite to say no to her employer so she went. Almost all her and Peter's salary was going to pay for Peter to make trips into New York to try to find a job. When they got to the grocery store Mrs. Hughes insisted that Helen buy chocolate covered doughnuts. Helen was appalled. Their money had to last until their first paycheck, which they wouldn't get for two weeks. She had no desire for donuts but felt compelled to comply.

Their only transportation was a bicycle, for which Dr. Hughes charged Peter \$5.00. Looking at the crush of cars speeding along the road in and out of the city, Peter was bewildered. *But how do I ride here?* Dr. Hughes pointed straight ahead and told him to *Just go with the traffic.*

Helen remembered that after a meal the Hughes would put the remainder of the roast on the floor for the dog. *I looked at the dog with envy. You could feed a family on their leftovers.* She described making a pie with whatever she had—stewed prunes and whipped egg whites, baked.

Mrs. Hughes had stripped the mansion of most help, evidently to economize.

•  
• There was a neglected Italian garden. After you turned into the gates and  
• drove up to the front by the long driveway, the façade of the house came  
• into view. It looked like a palace. It was made of molded cement or clay and  
• was three or four stories. There was a beautiful entrance and doors, and big  
• windows from floor to ceiling, and a balcony. We stayed in the attic, in the  
• servants' rooms.

•  
• The back of the house was on a bank that overlooked Long Island Sound.  
• There was a path down to the beach and a bath house. There were several  
• other buildings on the estate around the main house and these were rented  
• out to other families who were not immigrants or refugees but paid rent.



When our family stayed at Wenlo, the Italian garden had been neglected and overgrown. This photo shows it in its rebuilt stage. In fact, the whole woodland surrounding the main house was overgrown with trees and weeds and it was our father's job to clear it up.

The current photos show the grounds in their state prior to the Hughes residency or after a change of ownership and total upgrade of the grounds.

The main house was huge with 23 rooms and that meant that Helen had many bathrooms to clean, which was one of her main tasks. The grounds were enormous and wooded and it was Peter's job to rid them all of poison ivy. He had no idea at the time what this plant was but he labored with a sprayer strapped to his back and sprayed the grounds also pulling out the stubborn plants with his hands. It took him a week to cover all the grounds, and luckily he had no allergy to the plant at the time. Although many years later he did develop an acute sensitivity to poison ivy.

- 
- We worked nine hours a day for 13 days with one Sunday off. My knowledge
- of the English language was zero and I depended on a translator. Helen
- knew about two dozen words.
- 

Helen did not remember how much they were paid but the going rate for a medical intern at Wilmington General Hospital was \$150/month so it is likely the Hughes paid no more than \$25-50 every 13 days. Certainly they did not adhere to standard US labor practices, but then they deducted for room and board, and probably for housing for the children as well.

There was one other refugee couple on the premises; a Hungarian lawyer and his wife. She was in her 30s and he in his 50s. Lazlo was *older, European, intelligentsia*.

- 
- He was not used to manual labor and couldn't help Pop much. Pop did it all
- and got exhausted. He got jaundice and his eyes yellowed...One time he had
- to clean a toilet with Lazlo that had been clogged for years. The work was
- hard on Helen as well. The long hours were tiring and she explained ... I
- once almost fainted. I lay down on the floor. My two little ones came around
- me and gave me water. They tried to help.
- 

Helen felt that *in a strange way, Mrs. Hughes believed she was doing right* (by bringing them in, educated professionals, to do their manual labor). She felt she was sharing the secrets of her own success with them. Mrs. Hughes took Helen to gatherings of wealthy ladies to explain how to build up a practice. She also took them to church. During the sermon, *Dr. Hughes was sitting and doing some kind of calculations on a piece of paper*.

During all this time, Peter was making applications all over the country to practice medicine. He was finally given a position as an intern in Wilmington, Delaware, on probation. He didn't know English, or English medical terminology. This was his third time starting over as a physician in a foreign country.

Meanwhile, the Hughes' wanted Helen to learn to drive (presumably to ferry kids to school and to run errands). She didn't understand the road signs and, as she said, *driving was hellish*. Joe, the caretaker, was hired to teach Helen to drive. While Peter was away in Wilmington and the Hughes were on vacation, he made passes at Helen. She had a meeting with Dr. Hughes described as follows:



The back of the property opened out onto Long Island Sound. A famous 1920's bathhouse still remains as a historical monument. Our family had no camera so these photos were taken either by one of the other residents or our cousins Milya and Shura who came at least once to visit.



• He (Dr. Hughes) was sitting and I was standing in front of the desk. I told  
• him about Joe. He thought about it and then said, "Well, this is an unpleas-  
• ant situation. We value Joe very much." He paused. "You will have to make  
• different arrangements". I was shocked. What different arrangements could  
• I make?

• Fortunately, soon afterward Pop called and said we were moving to Wilm-  
• ington in three weeks. Dr. Miller told him to send for his family. I packed  
• everything, tied it with rope, carried it up the steps. Pop rented an apartment  
• (*On Broom Street in Wilmington*). Rent and all utilities for \$65/month. His  
• salary was \$150/month. Volodya came and helped us move with his car.

• Peter started as an intern, then became a resident, and finally Chief Resident  
• at Wilmington General Hospital. He passed the Maryland State Board Exam-  
• ination (taking it in either French or German), and in 1952 he received his  
• license to practice medicine in the state of Maryland, opening his office on  
• Main Street in Elkton on May 8, 1953.

## Epilogue to Wenlo

Wenlo is now a historic building on the Gold Coast of Long Island although it is still privately owned. For us it was a stepping stone into the US and a life of opportunity and peace. For its inhabitants it was a segment of a life with its own tragedies.

Beginning in the 1870's the mansion on the bay went through a number of transformations. In 1906, it was known as the Clapham-Stern House and in 1943 it was purchased by the wealthy Canadian ophthalmologist, Wendel L. Hughes and renamed Wenlo which combined his name, Wendell, with that of his wife, Louise.

Our time there was mercifully short and no ties with the Hughes remained after we left. In 1953, Louise died of colon cancer. In 1960, the ill fated estate suffered major damage from fire after which it remained neglected until restored in the original gothic style and resold. In 19?? Nancy married in a Chicago society wedding to Arthur Beel. An internet search of Peggy indicated she was retired from the health care industry and living somewhere in Arkansas although the information is not reliable. Of Billy we know nothing.

During the short time we spent in Wenlo, Peter used all his free time to look for a job. Getting into the city was not easy and he tried bicycling having rented a bike from Hughes for \$5.00. The traffic was daunting but the fare was cheap. It is likely he took the bike to the nearest bus stop into the city. Public transit in the 1950's was not convenient and did not extend to the Gold Coast suburbs.

And yet he persisted. Tackling various agencies and hospitals, with his bits of broken English and the constant pushing from Helen who kept his spirits up

and sent him out into the world. Helen always described herself as a shy and unassertive individual but in reality she provided the backbone that our father often lacked. She sent him out to look for work in Germany and now she pushed him into the mainstream of New York City.

One day Peter returned with news. He had gotten an internship at Wilmington General Hospital and Dr. Miller told him to send for his family. We were leaving Wenlo and Long Island and starting a new life.