



## MARIE aka MISCHI ZACHARAKIS

### **Introduction: Unveiling a Family Legacy**

It was a chilly January morning when a phone call from Athens shattered the stillness of my day. My auntie's neighbours, their voices laced with urgency and sadness, informed me of her deteriorating health. They urged me to come quickly, sensing the inevitable. My husband and I rushed to make arrangements, but despite our best efforts, we were too late. My beloved auntie, who had shared the family home with her mother, my grandmother, passed away in January 2018. This left us with the heartbreaking task of organizing her funeral and sorting through the possessions in the timeworn Athenian home that had been a repository of our family's history.

Stepping into the Athenian house felt like entering a time capsule. Dust clung to every surface, and the air was thick with the scents of old books and forgotten memories. Each cupboard and drawer we opened revealed a trove of history: neatly bundled letters, yellowed newspapers, and photographs from the 19th century. Among these treasures were books by Goethe and Kant, and the complete works of Shakespeare. The most astonishing find,

however, was a sketch by Gustav Klimt, gifted to my grandmother's father as a token of gratitude for his medical services.

In my grandmother's bedroom, an ancient leather trunk with a rusty padlock stood out amid the disorder. The key, tucked away in a crystal ashtray on a stately Bösendorfer grand piano, turned the lock with a creak. As the lid lifted, it unveiled the heart of my grandmother's legacy. Inside were layers of correspondence, documents, and keepsakes, all carefully preserved.

My grandmother, a beacon of love and inner strength, was the nearest and dearest to me after my parents. Her unwavering faith in me and her boundless affection were constants in my life. A woman of extraordinary talent in both art and verse, she had endured the trauma of losing all her loved ones during and shortly after the Second World War. Despite the profound loss and the betrayal by her homeland, she remained a pillar of strength, raising her three children in post-war Athens with barely any resources.

From a privileged upbringing in the bourgeoisie of Viennese high society to the hardships of widowhood in a foreign land, her life was a testament to resilience and grace. Her journey, from the grandeur of Vienna to the struggle of survival in Athens, is a story that needs to be told. This is not just a recounting of her past but a tribute to her spirit and a beacon for future generations to understand the profound impact of history on personal lives.

## **Childhood and Early Life**

### **Family Background and Influences**

My grandmother was born into a life of privilege and intellectual richness on May 20, 1903, at Zedlitzgasse 7 in Vienna. The Nirenstein family resided on the second floor of this grand building. The first floor was home to the esteemed Bertha Sophie Felicitas Freifrau von Suttner, the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and the first Austrian and Czech laureate.

Bertha von Suttner, a staunch advocate for peace and a formidable intellectual, had a profound influence on my grandmother. Their bond, formed in the shared spaces of Zedlitzgasse 7, left an indelible mark on my grandmother's values and perspectives. Bertha's dedication to pacifism and her tireless efforts for social justice were lessons that my grandmother carried with her throughout her life. This early exposure to such influential and compassionate figures helped shape my grandmother's steadfastness and moral compass, even as the world around her grew increasingly dark.

Her mother, Helene, the only daughter of Alexander and Elise, was a gentle and artistic woman with a deep passion for the arts, particularly English literature and poetry. Her father, Dr. Edmund Nirenstein, was a renowned medical doctor and scientist, known for his dedication and expertise. Together, they cultivated a household that deeply valued intellectual pursuits and artistic expression, providing my grandmother with a nurturing environment that celebrated the richness of cultural and literary heritage.



The world of affluence and intellectual prominence was deeply rooted in the fabric of Viennese society, where the Nirensteins, Kallirs, Nathansons, and Eisenstädters, all branches of my grandmother's close-knit family, were synonymous with prosperity, philanthropy, and cultural influence. Her lineage included notable figures such as Anton Rubinstein, Sigmund Freud, and Ludwig von Mises. Additionally, her family was related to the illustrious Wittgensteins and the Rothschilds, names that resonate with immense cultural and economic significance.

Her grandfather, Alexander Nirenstein, was the Managing Director of the Nathanson & Kallir Bank, a prestigious financial institution in Vienna. The family resided at Kantgasse 1, a grand residence that reflected their social status and was a hub for intellectual and social gatherings. Alexander's wife, Elise, brought further elegance and sophistication to the family, her lineage intertwined with the nobility and cultural elite of Vienna.



Kantgasse 1, second floor residence of my grandmother's grandparents Alexander & Elise Nirenstein



Elise & Alexander – my grandmothers' grandparents



Helene & Edmund Nirenstein - my grandmother's parents.

The Nirenstein household was at the heart of Vienna's vibrant cultural and intellectual life. Frequent visitors included prominent thinkers, artists, and philanthropists of the time.

### **Early Education and Governess Johnson**

My grandmother's early years were shaped significantly by her British governess, Ms. Johnson. Beyond her role as a caregiver, she was instrumental in my grandmother's education with a focus on English literature and language and early intellectual development, instilling in her a love for learning and a disciplined approach to life.



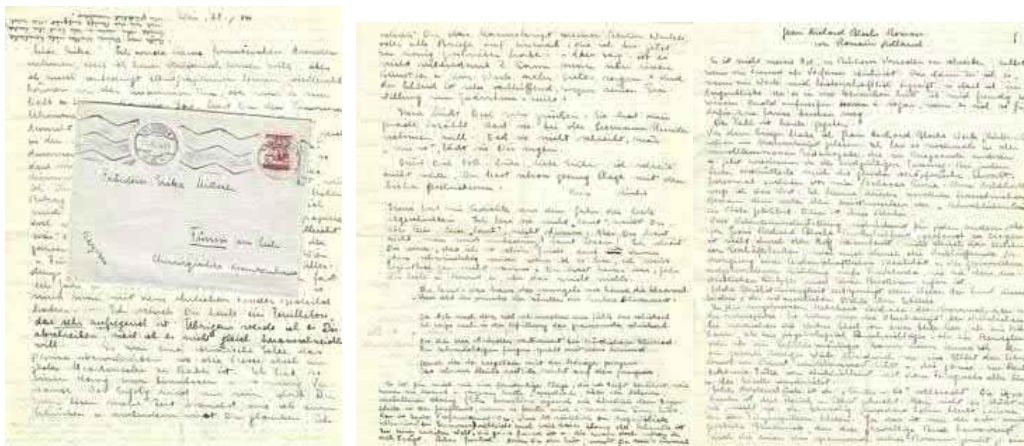
For her formal education, she attended the 'Privat Mädchen Volksschule' at Tuchlauben 14 in Vienna. Known for its rigorous academic standards, the school fostered a competitive and enriching environment. My grandmother excelled, consistently achieving top marks across all subjects, demonstrating her keen intellect and dedication to her studies.



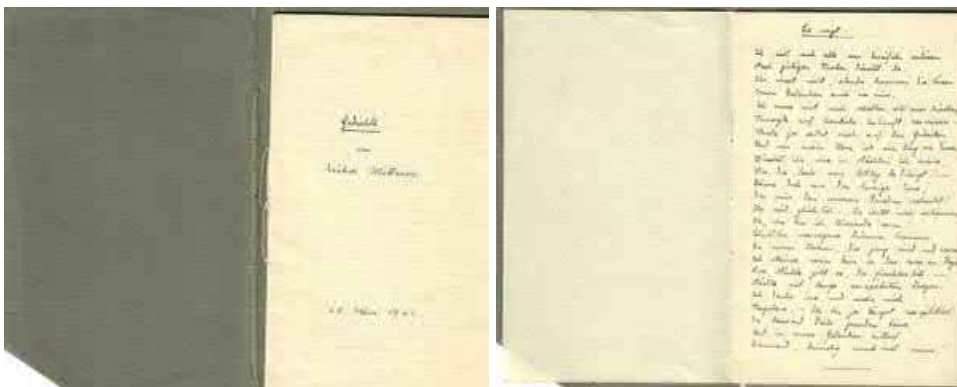
### Literary Enthusiasm and Correspondence with Erika Mitterer

Even from a young age, my grandmother was passionate about literature. This love was evident in her correspondence with friends such as Melitta Urbancic, Irene Kowaliska-Wegner and Erika Mitterer. On September 25, 1921, she wrote an exuberant letter to Erika about a feuilleton she had read, titled "Jean Richard Blochs Roman von Romain Rolland." Jean-Richard Bloch (25 May 1884 – 15 March 1947) was a French critic, novelist, and playwright, known for his affiliation with the French Communist Party and his collaboration with Louis Aragon in the evening daily *Ce Soir*.

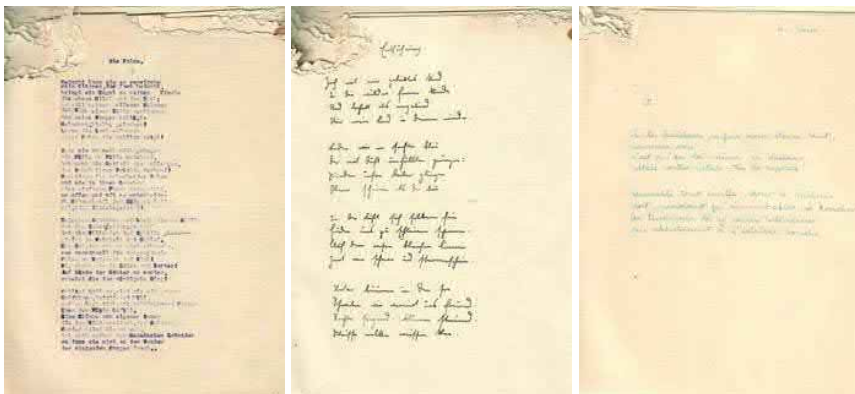
Rather than simply cutting out the article from the newspaper, my grandmother chose to rewrite the entire feuilleton by hand, filling six and a half pages of A4 paper. This act of dedication and enthusiasm highlights her deep engagement with literary works and her desire to share these passions with those close to her. Bloch's works, known for their critical and thoughtful examination of society, resonated with her own burgeoning intellectual interests.



In the vibrant intellectual cafes of Vienna during the 1920s, my Austrian grandmother forged a profound friendship with Erika Mitterer, bonded by their mutual love for poetry. Their poetic exchange was not confined to the city's bustling cafes but flourished amidst Austria's serene lakesides and majestic mountains during their holidays. Whether penning verses in correspondence or sharing them during their peaceful retreats, these moments became a testament to their enduring friendship and shared creative spirit, reflecting the cultural fervor of their era.



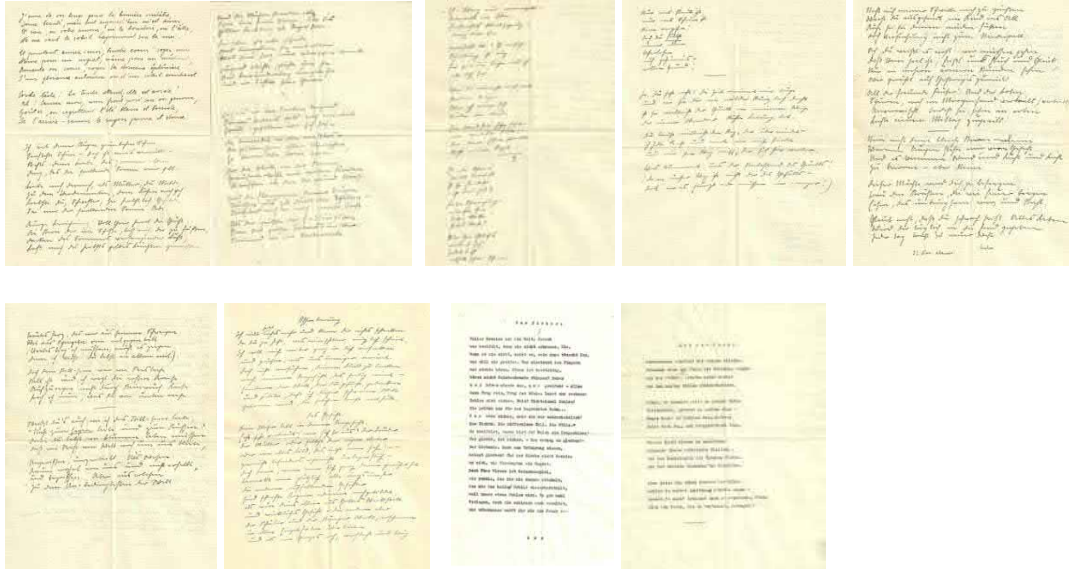
A booklet full of poetic verses sent to my granny from Erika.



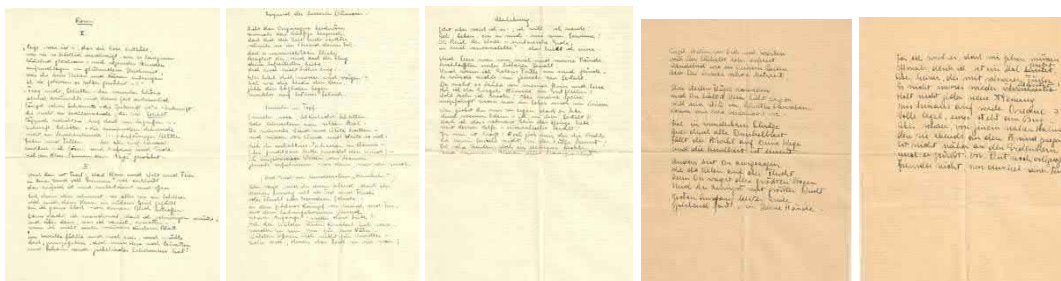
*This caption highlights the handwritten contributions and the mysterious typed pages, while providing context about the manuscript's historical significance.*

Displayed are three pages from a 34-page manuscript discovered among heirlooms. The central page features Erika Mitterer's distinctive handwriting, while the adjacent page to the right bears my grandmother's elegant French script. The initial pages, though typed, lack signatures, but are believed to be the work of Rainer Maria Rilke.

This manuscript not only underscores the collaboration and exchange of ideas among these literary figures but also hints at the personal connections and creative dialogues that unfolded among them during that era.



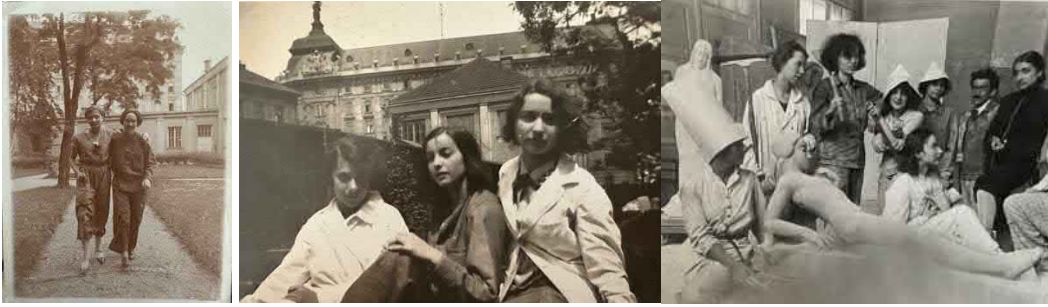
Varied randomly chosen poetic verses sent to my grandmother from Erika.



Poetic verses from my Grandmother Mischi

### Artistic Pursuits at the Kunstgewerbeschule

In October 1922, my grandmother took a significant step in her artistic journey by enrolling at the prestigious Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts) located at Stubenring 3 in Vienna. She studied there until February 15, 1928, immersing herself in a vibrant and progressive artistic community. The Kunstgewerbeschule was renowned for its innovative approach to art and design, encouraging students to explore new creative territories and refine their artistic voices.



During her time at the Kunstgewerbeschule, my grandmother had the opportunity to travel to Former Yugoslavia, Greece, Egypt and France as part of her studies. This experience was transformative. She spent time in Paris and Provence, where she met and befriended renowned artists, and especially key figures in the Surrealist movement. Their work and philosophy greatly influenced her own artistic development, encouraging her to delve into more experimental and avant-garde forms of expression.

Her time in France allowed her to expand her artistic horizons significantly. She was able to build a diverse portfolio and develop a distinctive style that blended her classical training with the avant-garde influences she encountered during her travels. This period was marked by a blossoming of creativity and a deepening of her engagement with the broader artistic movements of her time.

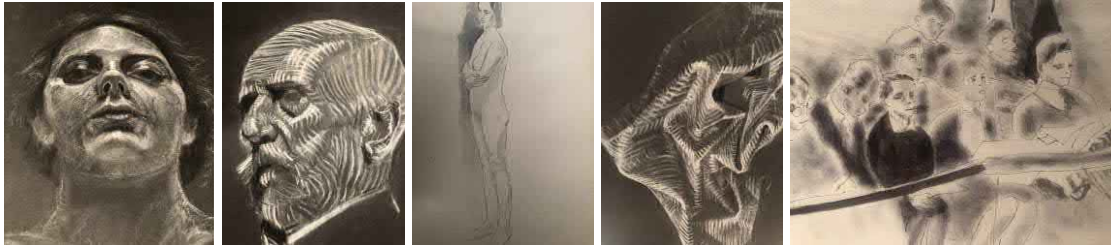
While in France, she formed a lasting friendship with André-Aimé-René Masson, a prominent figure in the surrealist movement. Masson's avant-garde style and philosophical approach to art deeply resonated with her, and their discussions and shared experiences helped shape her own artistic vision. His influence, combined with the diverse artistic environment of France, enabled her to build an impressive portfolio and develop a distinctive style that blended elements of surrealism with her own unique perspective.

Returning to Vienna, she brought with her not just an expanded artistic portfolio but also a wealth of experiences and a renewed perspective that would influence her work and life. Vienna, with its opulent palaces, lush parks, and the ever-present hum of creativity, was the backdrop of her formative years. It was in these years that she absorbed the cultural richness and intellectual fervor that would stay with her throughout her life.

However, beyond the façade of wealth and cultural vibrancy, the specter of rising anti-Semitism was beginning to cast a shadow over their lives. The political unrest and growing



hostility towards Jews threatened the idyllic world she had known. As the political climate worsened, the family's Jewish heritage, once a source of pride, became a perilous liability.



### **Building a Life of Artistic Expression**

As she continued her studies and artistic explorations, my grandmother built a life that was rich in cultural and intellectual engagement. The skills and insights she gained during this period equipped her with the tools to navigate the challenges she would face in the coming years, particularly as she embarked on a new chapter of her life with Andonis Zacharakis.

Her artistic journey, marked by her time at the Kunstgewerbeschule and her experiences in France, was a profound and formative period. It shaped her identity as an artist and a thinker, preparing her for the significant personal and historical events that would soon unfold in her life.

### **Intellectual and Artistic Connections**

From the grand halls of educational institutions to the intimate settings of Viennese salons and vibrant social gatherings, Marie aka Mischi Zacharaki nurtured a network of profound relationships that spanned continents and decades. These bonds, deeply embedded in the rich cultural milieu of Vienna, and later Athens, were not merely social. They were foundational to her intellectual growth and emotional endurance, offering rich, multifaceted dialogues that withstood the test of time and upheaval.

### **Foundations of Friendship**

Mischi's circle was formed in a variety of venues, each playing a critical role in the tapestry of her relationships:

- At the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna, Mischi met figures like **Hilde Adler**, her cousin who also pursued art. This institution served as a crucible where young intellectuals and artists formed lasting alliances, their shared educational pursuits laying a groundwork for future collaborations and exchanges.

## The Fabric of Mischi's Literary Circle

Mischi's circle included a remarkable roster of individuals who each left a distinct imprint on the intellectual landscape of the 20th century:

- **Erika Mitterer**, an author, dramatist, and epicist, shared a profound literary connection with Mischi, their exchanges often diving into deep explorations of narrative structure and character development.
- **Melitta Urbancic** (née Grünbaum), an artist and teacher, provided insights into the intertwining of visual and literary arts, enriching Mischi's understanding and appreciation of interdisciplinary creative expressions.
- **Siegfried Freiberg** and **Ernst Scheibelreiter**, both authors and poets, engaged with Mischi in discussions that often challenged the conventional boundaries of literature and poetry.
- **Theodor Kramer**, known for his poignant poetry, shared a particularly resonant bond with Mischi, as they both navigated the emotional and existential tumult of their times.
- **Ina Seidel**, a lyricist and author, along with **Edith Wellspacher-Emery**, a doctor, artist, and architect, brought diverse perspectives to their interactions, ranging from the medical to the architectural, illustrating the multifaceted nature of their dialogues.

## Exile and Endurance

While many of Mischi's acquaintances were Austrians, the rise of the Third Reich forced some members of her circle to flee their homeland due to Jewish heritage or political persecution, finding refuge in countries such as Italy, Iceland, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. However, not all were Jewish or directly threatened by the Nazi regime, reflecting the complex and varied impacts of the geopolitical upheavals of the time. Those who stayed often faced their own sets of challenges but continued to engage in intellectual discourse through letters, which Mischi cherished.

- **Lotte Palfi Andors**, an author and actress who starred in "Casablanca", found safety in Hollywood but maintained her literary ties with Mischi, sharing insights from the American film industry and its contrasts with European cinematic traditions.
- **Irene Kowaliska Wegner**, a painter and ceramist who was married to Armin Wegner, a man imprisoned by Hitler for his opposition to the regime, along with **Olga Marie Rubin Beaufils**, an artist, contributed to discussions that often revolved around the visual interpretation of the societal changes they were witnessing.
- **Paul Kowaliski**, a photographer, captured the era's turbulence through his lens, his photographs often sparking discussions on the role of visual media in documenting history.

**Other close friends were Ilse Elisabeth Luckmann** – Author, **Nellie Hortense Friedrichs** (née Bruell) – Author, **Garda Kaufmann-Irmen** - Theatre actress, **Ilse Strobl Luckmann** - Author, publisher and **Walter Ritter** - Sculptor, artist.

## A Refuge in Words

Despite the distances and the tumult of war and displacement, the exchange of letters among Mischi and her friends remained a sanctuary of intellectual engagement and emotional support. These letters were not merely casual exchanges but were filled with philosophical discourse, poetry, and deep literary analysis, reflecting their shared commitment to understanding and interpreting the world around them. Mischi's home in Athens became a physical and metaphorical archive of this vibrant correspondence, preserving a legacy of intellectual rigor and profound human connection.

These individuals not only reflect the wide range of Mischi's social and professional network but also her deep connection to the arts and intellectual circles across Europe. Many of these contacts had to flee Vienna due to the Third Reich and relocated to various countries such as Italy, Iceland, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Despite the geographical distances, they maintained regular correspondence with Mischi, exchanging philosophical discourse, poetry, and literature. These enduring relationships offered Mischi a continual sense of community and intellectual engagement throughout her life.

## The Wedding and Move to Athens

### Love at First Sight in Crete

In 1935, my grandmother's life took a dramatic turn when she met the love of her life, Andonis Zacharakis. Their meeting was as serendipitous as it was fateful, occurring on the ancient grounds of Festos in Crete. My grandmother was on a cruise exploring the Greek islands with her best friend, Erika Mitterer, and had wandered off to explore the archaeological site alone.

As she admired the ancient ruins, her path crossed with Andonis, who was visiting the site with his *Kritikos Lagonikos* dog. The sight of the large dog initially frightened my grandmother. Sensing her fear, Andonis quickly tried to reassure her, first speaking in Greek, but to no avail. It was only when they both attempted Italian that they found a common language. Andonis explained that the dog was friendly and would not harm her, which helped to calm her fears. This brief exchange led to a deeper conversation in Italian, allowing them to connect and find common ground in each other's company.



Andonis, a Greek by birth, was fluent in Italian due to his studies in political science at Padua University in Italy. Despite his academic pursuits, his true passion lay in poetry and playwriting, qualities that made him even more enchanting. His intellect, charm, and good looks left a lasting impression on my grandmother, who found in him a soulmate with whom she could share her love for culture and creativity.

**Andonis Zacharakis**

## **Wedding and Migration to Greece**

Their love blossomed quickly, leading to their wedding on January 10, 1937, at the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Vienna, located at Fleischmarkt 13. The church, with its rich history and significance to the Greek community in Vienna, provided a meaningful setting for their union. The ceremony was conducted by Dr. Chrysostomos Tsiter, who would later become the Metropolitan of Austria and Exarch of Hungary and Middle Europe, adding a touch of spiritual gravity to their vows.

The wedding was attended by close friends and family. Dr. Hans Lenz and Fanny Kallir Nirenstein, née Franziska von Löwenstein zu Scharffeneck, served as witnesses. Franziska otherwise known as Fanny, the wife of my grandmother's cousin Otto Kallir, brought a sense of familial warmth to the occasion.

Amid the joyous celebration, the reality of the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Vienna loomed large. The couple decided that it was safest to leave Austria and make a new life in Greece. In 1938, they relocated to Athens, seeking refuge and the chance to start anew in Andonis's homeland. This move marked the beginning of a new chapter filled with both hope and the challenges of adapting to a new culture and environment.

## **The New Life in Athens**

### **Settling into a New Home**

Arriving in Athens, my grandmother and Andonis, as my grandmother called him, Toni, set about building a new life together. The city, with its rich cultural heritage and vibrant atmosphere, became their sanctuary. My grandmother, with her characteristic determination and adaptability, quickly integrated into Greek society, learning the language and embracing the local customs with enthusiasm.

It was here that they started their family, welcoming their first-born son, Evangelios, affectionately nicknamed Bulli.

Bulli, from a young age, showed a strong connection to his father's Cretan roots. This bond led him to spend a significant portion of his youth working for his father's side of the family in São Paulo, Brazil. The experience in Brazil was transformative, instilling in him a deep appreciation for his heritage and a formidable work ethic.

Upon his return to Greece, Bulli embarked on a lifelong career at Phoenix, the insurance company, where he served as a manager with unwavering dedication. His professional life was marked by the same qualities of integrity and perseverance that had been nurtured by both his parents. Bulli's commitment to his work and family mirrored the resilience that was a hallmark of his mother's own life.

Following Bulli's birth, my grandmother and Andonis expanded their family, welcoming two daughters—first my mother, Helene, and then Katina. Each child brought new joy and responsibilities, further deepening my grandmother's connection to her adopted home in Athens.

Sadly, Bulli passed away on July 24, 2009, leaving behind a legacy that reflected the values instilled in him by his parents. His journey from Athens to Brazil and back was a testament to the family's ability to adapt and thrive, even in the face of immense change.

Andonis, ever the creative soul, continued to pursue his passion for poetry and drama. His works were deeply influenced by the rich traditions of Greek culture and the turbulent times they were living through. His charm and generosity endeared him to many, making him a cherished figure within their community.

### A sample of his mesmerizing works



*Lost Love*

*The Tragedy of the Abyss*

### Family Life During World War II

The outbreak of World War II brought immense challenges for the family. With three young children to care for, my grandparents faced the harsh realities of life under occupation. They struggled with scarcity and constant danger, yet they remained resilient and committed to providing a loving and stable environment for their children.

During these difficult years, Toni's creativity and my grandmother's strength became their anchors. Toni's poetry and plays provided a source of solace and hope, not just for their family, but for others in their community who found comfort in his words.

## The Loss of Her Father

### A Heartbreaking Farewell

The loss of her father was one of the most life-altering experiences for my grandmother. Dr. Edmund Nirenstein passed away on the morning of November 19, 1945. At the time, he was residing at 133 rue de Lausanne, Switzerland, sharing a flat with Mr. and Mrs. Trotzky.

The last correspondence from her father was a postcard written in English, dated June 7, 1945. In it, he expressed his hope that the card would reach her, inquiring about her well-being and that of her family. He wrote about his daily routine, his ongoing research, and his reflections on aging. The postcard read:

*“My Dear Mischi,*

*I wonder if you will get this card. Should this occur, drop a line and let me know how you all are: you, Tony, and the children. With me, it is always the same: as people here are saying ‘comme ci, comme ça’. I don’t know whether I am feeling better on account of my 74 years or if I am living to be an expectedly high age because of my being better? As a matter of fact, I am steadily at my research work for many hours daily and, what is more, in English. However, there are still lots of work before me.*

*Heaps of love and more kisses to all of you.*

*Yours affectionately, Papa”*

This postcard, carefully wrapped in cream tissue paper, was my grandmother’s most treasured possession. It was a tangible connection to her father and a poignant reminder of the family she had left behind. The loss of her father, compounded by the physical distance and the tumultuous times, marked a profound moment of sorrow in her life.

### One more tragic, profound loss of a loved one

Tragedy struck on April 20, 1954, when Andonis suddenly passed away from a heart attack at their home in Athens. He was only 45 years old. His death left a profound void in the lives of my grandmother and their three children. Toni had been the cornerstone of their family, and his loss was deeply felt by all who knew and loved him. My mother, especially, was profoundly affected. She kept his photo in a very special place in our cottage in England, a constant reminder of the father she lost too soon. This treasured photograph symbolized the enduring connection and the deep love she had for him, despite the years that separated them.

After Toni’s death, my grandmother faced the daunting task of paying back the loan for the bookshop and ultimately had to give it up. In addition to these financial challenges, she also had to raise their three young children on her own. Despite these immense hardships, she remained resilient and dedicated, drawing on her inner strength to support her family through this difficult period.

Demonstrating remarkable tenacity and determination, she secured a job at Demetre Matheopoulos & Co., located at Mavromichali Str. 10 in Athens. There, she worked as a translator and interpreter, a role that demanded her extensive language skills. She translated legal documents and a myriad of other materials, primarily from Greek to German and vice versa, but also utilized her mastery of several other languages.

My grandmother found great satisfaction in her work, relishing the intellectual challenge and the opportunity to use her linguistic talents. She loved her job and was dedicated to it, often arriving early at the office and working long hours. Despite reaching the age at which most would retire, she continued to work diligently, driven by her passion for her work.

Her dedication and hard work not only provided for her children but also set an inspiring example of perseverance and strength. She remained with Demetre Matheopoulos & Co. well beyond the typical retirement age, demonstrating an unwavering work ethic and a love for her profession that never waned.

My grandmother's ability to rebuild her life and find purpose in her work after such a devastating loss is a testament to her incredible resolve and indomitable spirit. Her legacy is one of strength, perseverance, and a steadfast commitment to her family, friends and her work.

## **A New Endeavour: The Bookshop on Filellinon**

### **A Vision for the Future**

In the months leading up to his death, Antony had embarked on a new venture that reflected his enduring passion for literature. On March 22, 1954, he and his business partner, Dionysus Papakyriakopoulos, decided to open a bookshop (βιβλιοπωλείο) at Filellinon 4, near Syntagma Square in the heart of Athens. This new enterprise was meant to be a cultural hub, where people could explore the world of books and engage in intellectual exchange.

The bookshop represented Toni's dream of fostering a community centered around literature and ideas. It was a testament to his love for the written word and his desire to share that love with others.

## **An Unfulfilled Dream**

### **Philosophical Reflections on Life and Death**

The profound losses my grandmother experienced – first her father and then her husband – deeply influenced her perspective on life and death. This was poignantly expressed in a letter she wrote on June 11, 1958, to her friend Melitta Urbancic, following the death of Melitta's husband, Viktor Urbancic. With the hindsight of losing two of the most important men in her life, she shared her reflections on grief, endurance, and the nature of existence. Here is an excerpt from that letter:



## Final Years and Legacy

### Enduring Love and Resilience

My grandmother continued to live a life marked by resilience and love, drawing strength from her memories and her unwavering commitment to her family. She remained a pillar of support for her children and grandchildren, imparting the wisdom she had gained through her own experiences.

Her final years were spent in quiet reflection and the comfort of family. Despite the many losses she had endured, she continued to find joy in the simple pleasures of life and the company of her loved ones.

Throughout her life, my grandmother maintained close friendships with several remarkable women who provided her with companionship and support. These included Erika Mitterer, Irene Kowaliska-Wegner, Melitta Urbancic, Edith Wellspacher-Emery, and Lotti Palfi Andors. Their friendships were a source of strength and inspiration, and they shared in each other's joys and sorrows, providing a network of mutual support.

Of utmost importance was the strong and wise advice and assistance she received from her closest relative, Otto Kallir Nirenstein. Otto was a steadfast presence in her life, offering unwavering support through both good and bad times. His guidance and support were invaluable, helping her navigate the many challenges she faced.



## **A Heartbreaking Final Chapter**

The most heartbreaking chapter of my grandmother's life came with the loss of her daughter, Helene – my mother. Helene passed away on February 5, 1993, a tragedy that deeply affected my grandmother. The profound grief of losing her beloved daughter was a blow from which she never fully recovered.

My grandmother's own health began to decline rapidly after my mother's death. She passed away on September 24, 1993, at the age of 90. It is believed that her death was likely due to heartbreak, a testament to the deep and abiding love she had for her daughter.

In her final letter to my older sister following the passing of our mother, my grandmother quoted Shakespeare, encapsulating her enduring wisdom and reflective nature:

***“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”*** – William Shakespeare, **The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, Act 1, Scene 5.**

## **Legacy of Love and Wisdom**

My grandmother's life was a testament to strength, love, and an unwavering commitment to family. From her privileged upbringing in Vienna, surrounded by cultural and intellectual richness, to her adventurous move to Athens and the challenges of wartime, she faced every challenge with grace and strength.

During the war, food was scarce, and some days they hardly had any food, a hardship that deeply affected the family. My mother often recounted these difficult times, describing how they endured the scarcity with determination and solidarity. Despite these hardships, my grandmother remained a pillar of strength, ensuring that her children felt loved and secure even in the face of adversity.

She chose to remain in Athens for the rest of her life, never returning to Austria. Her memories of Vienna were treasured, but her heart belonged to the life she had built in Greece. The loss of her father, Dr. Edmund Nirenstein, on November 19, 1945, in Geneva was another profound sorrow, yet she carried his memory with her always, holding onto the last postcard he had sent her from Switzerland.

Throughout her life, my grandmother found solace and inspiration in the arts. Her studies at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna, her time in France building her portfolio and developing her style, and the unwavering support from friends and family that enriched her creative spirit and provided a source of comfort and expression.

In the end, my grandmother's story is one of courage, love, and an unwavering commitment to family and creativity. Her legacy lives on in the memories and stories she left behind, a testament to a life lived with passion, purpose, and an enduring spirit of strength.

## Personal Reflections and Final Words

### My Personal Final Words

My memories of my grandmother were magical – she was probably the most loving, cultured, and intelligent woman I have ever come across. Every summer, up to the year she died, my sisters and I would visit her in Athens. Those summers were a time of enchantment and learning, filled with moments that I will cherish forever.

In the warm nights, we would sit together on her balcony, next to a fragrant jasmine climber wrapped around the rails. She would recite poetry to me as a child and read renowned German children's books, even though I could barely understand the language. But that was never a problem, as she would always explain the stories to me in English, emphasizing the morals and lessons contained within them.

She often spoke about her days in Vienna as a privileged child, describing visits to the opera in horse-drawn carriages and the cultural richness that surrounded her upbringing. These stories brought to life a world of elegance and sophistication, a stark contrast to the simplicity of our balcony in Athens, yet equally magical in their telling.

Saying farewell at the end of each summer was always heart-wrenching. She tried to mask her emotions, not wanting me to notice her eyes swelling up with tears. Despite her efforts, we would both cry, her tears reflecting the deep bond we shared. I can still see her standing on the balcony, waving and trying to stop the tears running down her cheeks, a poignant image of love and longing.

My grandmother was a role model in every sense. She always looked groomed to perfection with her thick grey hair tied back in a bun, her powdered face, and her elegant, often grey, outfits complemented by fabric loafers. I adored her style and aspired to her grace and poise.

For my birthdays and Christmas, she would send me books on ballet, knowing my passion for dance, and vinyl records of ballet operas. My most treasured record from her was "Coppélia, or La Fille aux Yeux d'Émail (The Girl with the Enamel Eyes)," a comic ballet from 1870 choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon to the music of Léo Delibes, based on E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann." Listening to it transported me to a world of beauty and artistry, a gift that encapsulated her understanding and nurturing of my dreams.

My grandmother's influence on my life extended far beyond these tangible gifts. She instilled in me a love for culture, a deep appreciation for the arts, and an understanding of the importance of moral values. My sisters and I affectionately called her Yiayia Mischi, as "yiayia" means granny in Greek. In turn, she called me Choupsi, perhaps a shortening of "choupinet" or "choupinette" from the French words "chou" and "poupinet," meaning "baby-like appearance." Her wisdom, grace, and unwavering love were a guiding light in my life, shaping the person I have become.

As I reflect on her life, I am filled with admiration and gratitude for the woman who was my grandmother. Her legacy lives on in the memories and values she imparted to us, a testament to a life lived with passion, purpose, and an enduring spirit of adaptability. She remains, in my heart and memory, a beacon of love and wisdom, whose influence will be felt for generations to come.