



THE GREEK STAR EXCLUSIVE: Q & A with Elias Kulukundis

This week Associate Editor Maria A. Karamitsos caught up with Elias Kulukundis, a member of the prominent Greek shipping family, and author of “The Amorgos Conspiracy”

The English version of “The Amorgos Conspiracy,” a real life adventure story that took place during Greece’s Junta years, was recently released. I had the opportunity to speak to Mr. Kulukundis via phone, from Berlin, where he’s working on his next book. The book review follows the Q&A.

Do you live in Berlin?

I used to spend a lot of time here. I have a small apartment and come here when I need to concentrate on something. There are no distractions here, so I came to start the next book. I live in New York and Syros, Greece.

Where were you born and raised?

Westchester County, NY.

Where do you trace your Greek roots?

To Kasos Island, though my parents were born in Syros.

You are the scion of the well-known shipping family. Was your family surprised that you wanted to be a writer and not go into the family business?

There was certainly a lot of pressure to join the family business. It was assumed that everyone in the family would. Some family members asked me why I wanted to be a writer, saying, “What will you do? Open a library?” It seemed an odd thing to them. I guess I’m a bit of a pioneer. I’ve never really been one to accept the first response. Even in school, I always questioned the answers I was given. I grew up in New York, a place where everyone makes his or her own life. Herein lies the conflict between the Greek and American ways of life – the Greek way says “take your place in the family business,” while the American says “do what you want to do.” I am now doing both.

Why did you want to share the story of “The Amorgos Conspiracy,” and at this juncture?

This is something I know a lot about, and when you know a lot about something, you want to tell others. If you’re a writer, you want to write about it. This Junta period in Greek history is in the shadows now. Many, even in Greece, tell me that they don’t know much about it. It’s coming out now because the people in Greece, people in general, are ready to read about this time in history, to learn how they got where they are. Politicians in the book don’t act very well. We get a background as to why the politicians in Greece are as they are.

You planned an ambitious mission. Did you have any doubts about it?

There didn’t seem to be a reason why it wouldn’t work. There were plenty of occasions when I thought I’d have to give it up. Finding the boat was the main obstacle. Almost until the last week, we didn’t have a boat. Everything else was ready. The guy who was supposed to help me find a boat, was secretly working for Andreas Papandreou, who didn’t want this to happen. They wanted us to leave it alone. They didn’t want any trouble. Someone overheard him talking to my helper on the phone, and this person put it together and then called someone in Rome, who said he could connect me with a crew. They had a boat, I had a prisoner. We got together. I couldn’t necessarily count on it, but when you start something, you want to finish it.

When was the Greek version released?

November 2012.

How’s it being received?

The book got good reviews in Athens. It’s become quite well-known there. The English edition came out last month.

Will you do a book tour to promote it? If yes, any possibilities for Chicago?

Yes. I would love to come to Chicago.

You've started talking about a campaign, where Diaspora Greeks can help Greeks in Greece.

I'm looking for ideas too. It's not a straight road from point A to point B. Here's a whole nation of people – the Greek nation is not limited to the borders of Greece. That's why I call this "Greece without Borders." We come from a lot of different countries. This is how we lived before there was a Greek government in Athens. We are as successful as Greeks in Greece, sometimes more successful. What's not successful is the Greek government. We have to recognize that the Greek government is a pretty recent invention – it started in 1830 and has had many fits and starts. The Greek government has not done right by the Greek people. Why is Greece so well-known? Not because of government, but because of the Greek people. We have to reason backwards – let's look at what our strengths are. We, the Greeks outside of Greece, can help forge an alliance with the people in Greece, and the Greek land. I don't think we need to depend on the Greek government. As a businessman, I don't think the Greek government is a good risk. Its performance has not been very good, whereas the Greek people traditionally have come through. Remember the Greeks beating the Italians in Albania; to cite one example. We have to remember that. Any way that we can support private organizations in Greece, we should look for those ways – private organization to private organization. For example, the way people supported the California school system that was in great need: contributions were made directly to the schools, bypassing the California state government.

Look for organizations that are trying to improve life for the people. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation recently gave money for lunches for schoolchildren in Greece because the state was cutting back. Budget cuts are making Greek life deteriorate, and the foundation tried to step in. That kind of intervention is needed, not giving funds directly to the Greek government. Let's come

up with ideas, go to Greece, find a cause and organization and research it; come home, tell people what's needed and why, and start raising money. This is one way we can help.

What's next for you?

Another book. Anything I could say about it right now might not be true tomorrow. I can say that it's about Greece, and about the period after "The Amorgos Conspiracy." Conspiracies don't end right away. You might call it fiction, though it's based on fact.

Where is the book available for purchase?

www.eliaskulukundis.com or www.books.gr.

BOOK REVIEW

The Amorgos Conspiracy

By: Elias Kulukundis

ISBN: 978-960-200-16-0

G.C.Eleftheroudakis S.A.

Publication date: June 27, 2013

The Junta Years, also known as the Regime of the Colonels, is a dark era in Modern Greek history. Greek American Elias Kulukundis, author, and member of the famous shipping family, became part of that history. Riding on a young man's believe of being invincible, and wanting to wrong a right, in 1969, he set forth an ambitious, courageous—and very risky—plan to rescue an exiled Greek government minister, who just happened to be his father-in-law.

Kulukundis released his first book, "The Feasts of Memory," two months after the Colonels took over Greece. Following its launch, the author met many Greek journalists and politically-aware individuals who nurtured his burgeoning interest in Greek politics.

Soon after, Kulukundis would meet "a nice Greek girl" at a party, who would change his life, in so many ways. When he met Eleni Mylonas, little did he know he was meeting his future wife,

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Books



CROSSWORD PUZZLE

- ACROSS**
- 1 Abridged (abbr.)
 - 4 Alaska Hawaii Std. Time (abbr.)
 - 8 Wound crust
 - 12 Bikini top
 - 13 Servant of Adriana
 - 14 Canine animal
 - 15 Cistern
 - 16 Fruit
 - 17 Bowfin
 - 18 Bulky
 - 20 Electric unit
 - 21 Sharpshooter
 - 22 Hang
 - 25 Sergeant fish
 - 28 Garden pond fish
 - 29 To (Scot.)
 - 30 Ungula
 - 31 Male person
 - 32 Gr. community
 - 33 Diminutive (suf.)
 - 34 Body of water

- 35 Same (Lat.)
- 36 Sweet potato
- 38 Loose woman
- 39 Tread softly
- 40 Rimu (2 words)
- 44 Scent
- 46 Goodbye (Ital.)
- 47 Amateur Athletic Assn (abbr.)
- 48 P.I. knife
- 49 Enclosed (abbr.)
- 50 Soldiers
- 51 Earthly paradise
- 52 Turk. title
- 53 Hymn

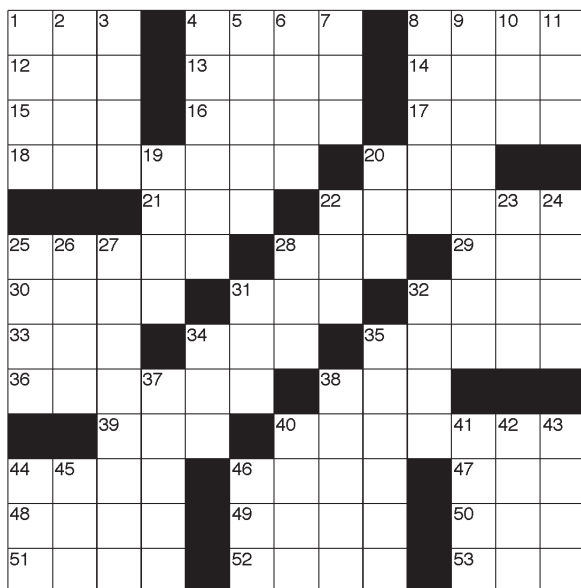
- DOWN**
- 1 Eastern bishop's title
 - 2 Finely dressed (Scot.)
 - 3 Afflict
 - 4 Paco
 - 5 Hour (Fr.)

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

M	A	R	S		R	O	C		T	A	A	L
A	N	O	A		U	C	A		I	D	A	E
I	C	O	N		D	A	R		E	A	R	N
L	E	S	S	E		G	A	R	R	E	T	
				E	A	R		O	E	C		
V	I	M	I	N	A	L		T	E	N	O	N
A	S	A			L	A	B		A	B	E	
N	E	W	E	L		C	R	E	S	S	E	T
				S	E	P		E	N	A		
A	V	O	C	E	T		V	A	L	I	S	E
B	E	L	A		E	L	I		I	D	E	A
E	G	E	R		R	E	E		N	E	C	R
L	A	A	P		O	A	R		A	M	Y	L

- 6 Jackfish
- 7 Three (pref.)
- 8 Marsh
- 9 Ran
- 10 Caliph
- 11 Bachelor of Fine Arts (abbr.)
- 19 Stray child
- 20 Male friend (Fr.)
- 22 Iodine (pref.)
- 23 Nominate
- 24 Consider
- 25 Bait fish
- 26 Girlfriend of Alley Oop
- 27 Mast (2 words)
- 28 "The Jungle Book" python

- 31 Pasture
- 32 Dank
- 34 Standard (abbr.)
- 35 Phantoms
- 37 Brother of Moses
- 38 Shore
- 40 Circle
- 41 False friend
- 42 Freshwater worm
- 43 Repose
- 44 Laconian clan group
- 45 Department of Defense (abbr.)
- 46 Council for Econ. Advisors (abbr.)



Elias Kulukundis...continued

who incidentally was the daughter of a Greek politician. This politician, George Mylonas, was serving as Minister of Education in (the elder) George Papandreou's government, when the Colonels took over. Many government officials were exiled, including Mylonas, who was sent to the island of Amorgos. Kulukundis organized an international conspiracy, to kidnap—er rescue—Mylonas from exile.

"I was young; I thought at the time I could do anything.

He offers a suspenseful, intriguing thriller—and a true story—of a young man's dangerous fight for what's right, in a period of great mystery, fear and loss of hope.

It really all happened gradually. The first step was when a friend came with slides of the terrain, and I began to think about it, see the possibilities. It really was the only way. Going through international organizations was not going to work. I thought, should I sit back and leave someone imprisoned indefinitely? There were no charges against him; he didn't know what would happen. It seemed the right thing to do. I was brought up to think you should always do the right thing," he explained.

The author found himself in Paris, meeting with now-renowned members of the resistance, and plotting the rescue. Would it all come together? How could they spirit the minister away without anyone noticing? Would they be caught? Would they be successful? You'll have to read the book to find out. A gifted storyteller, Kulukundis doesn't disappoint. As the plan unfurls and the rescue mission is set in motion, you'll be on the edge of your seat. He offers a suspenseful, intriguing thriller—and a true story—of a young man's dangerous fight for what's right, in a period of great mystery, fear and loss of hope.

We also get a glimpse into this little-known and rarely-spoken-about time, and insight into the evolution of today's Greek politician. Lovers of history, as well as thrillers, will enjoy this book.