

6 October 2005

European Studies Council
Yale Center for International and Area Studies
Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue

Dear Stavros S. Niarchos Foundation Officers,

I am so grateful to the Niarchos Foundation and to the European Studies Council for supporting my five-week stay in Greece this summer, which was fascinating and productive. I learned a great deal and am currently looking into ways in which I can continue my studies of modern Greek language and culture this year in Berlin.

I arrived in Athens in the beginning of August and spent a week there, visiting the Gennadion Library and exploring the museums. Then I went to the island of Ikaria, where I spent four weeks taking modern Greek language classes on a hillside overlooking the sea near the mountain village of Arethousa. For the first two weeks, my courses were with the school run by Ifigenia Georgiadou, called the Hellenic Culture Center, which will be moving to Mytilene next year. I was in the Beginners level and we had two hours of class each morning. I was one of only two students in the class, and the other student also knew ancient Greek well, so we were able to move very fast. There were about 10 students in the school all together, and four teachers, and the other students were much more advanced—several of them were professional translators or interpreters. Greek was the lingua franca of the school, and so I learned by listening to the conversations of the others. Each night we would cook or sing Greek songs and dance, or watch a Greek film or go to the local taverna. We also explored the island, hiking in the woods and visiting local artisans (a potter, a weaver, a winemaker).

During the second two weeks my courses were with the school run by Mihalis Kavouriaris in the same place, which is called the Ikarian Centre. We had four hours of classes daily, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, with different teachers. I would recommend this school more highly. Kavouriaris is a masterful teacher and wise beyond his 15 years of experience. He also seems to hate to speak English, which I found to be a rarity among the teachers I met, all of whom spoke very good English as well as French or German and understandably preferred to practice them rather than speak broken Greek. The patience of Eugenia Kollia and Kavouriaris, the teachers at the Ikarian Centre school, for the latter was unparalleled. Having more class time each day was also helpful, as was having two different teachers with slightly different approaches.

I lived at the school for three weeks, but I spent one week living in Evdilos, a harbor town whose few hundred permanent residents make it the metropolis of the area. In some ways I think living in Evdilos was more helpful for my Greek than living at the school, where it was easy to lapse into another language while cooking or at the beach with other students. In general, the less time I spent with the other students and the more time I spent with the teachers and other Greek people I met, the more my speaking skills

improved. During the last week I was there, a theater troupe from Athens stayed at the school. They were on the island to put on a Commedia dell'Arte play that had just been translated from Italian. They took over the school with music and rehearsals and cooking and carousing, and made Greek speakers far more numerous than non-Greek speakers for the week, and that was when I learned the most by far during my stay. So while I acknowledge the benefits of formal instruction, I think that the best way to learn Greek may not be in a residential school setting, but by taking language courses while living on one's own instead of in a group of other students. If I go back to Greece for further language study as I hope to, I will live alone and avoid spending time with people from my Greek classes.

Besides the courses I took and the time I was able to spend speaking Greek informally, I have been learning a lot about modern Greek culture, of which I was pretty much ignorant before my trip. I had read some modern Greek poetry in translation in America, and since I have gotten to Berlin I have been reading Cavafy and Elytis in Greek. I have found several bookstores which sell modern Greek books, and met a Greek opera singer through a friend of a friend, who has been introducing me to lots of wonderful Greek music and taking me to a taverna in their neighborhood where we chat in Greek with the proprietors, who are from Thessaloniki. When the semester begins in mid-October I will be auditing a Greek class, and I hope to be involved with the several modern Greek culture groups here in Berlin.

I have also been reading in English about Greek history since I got back, and am especially interested in the history of modern Greek attitudes toward ancient Greece since Independence—how they have been affected by political movements and how they have shaped the language. This may be the most fascinating topic I have ever studied, but I am frustratingly crippled by my elementary language skills and by general ignorance. I hope to find all there is to read in English on the recent history of the Greek language while improving my modern Greek. To be perfectly honest, the decision to study Modern Greek was originally a whim on my part—after devoting so much of my time to ancient Greek, I was idly curious about the modern language of the same name. Since this summer, that casual interest has become something of an obsession. I want to thank you all so much again, not only for your financial support, but also for the help and encouragement I have received from George Syrimis. I am so glad that the Hellenic Studies Program exists at Yale and only wish I had been involved with it earlier in my time there.

Sincerely,

Daniela Dover
Yale College c/o 2005