

* ELPIDES 1995: "Breaking Silences"

By Susan Kiesel Klerides

For generations, Greek and Greek American women have been bound (and gagged) by the tradition of keeping family problems to themselves. The mere thought, "What will people say?" has often been enough to keep them suffering in silence. With time, these women grew tired of "praying" for their situations to change or "just waiting it out." In their hearts they knew they needed some kind of help, but where could they go? Who could they trust?

ELPIDES was created to reach out to Greek and Greek American women in situations like these - experiencing marital or family problems, perhaps abuse, or a myriad of other domestic problems who are afraid to seek outside help. Because ELPIDES was founded by and for Greek and Greek American women, the hope was that they could be trusted to confidentially offer information and referrals.

ELPIDES President Georgia Post explains, "We are all daughters, or mothers, or sisters, with experiences to share. If we don't help each other, who will?" ELPIDES was founded in 1993 and incorporated in 1994, after a year-long process, to meet the growing needs of Greek and Greek American women and their families. ELPIDES provides free information, referrals, and support for problems such as immigration, parenting, health care, aging, employment, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, rape, and gambling. ELPIDES is run by volunteers including psychologists, lawyers, social workers,

and respond to her. She is someone who can be trusted."

As Ms. Post explains, 53 programs have been broadcast to date. "On our first show, Tina (Santorineou), Paula (Gregoriades), and I introduced ELPIDES, and explained what our mission was. Our shows have since dealt with women's and family issues such as gambling, money, divorce, custody, children, school, elderly parents, and of course, domestic violence, including what is or isn't practical in terms of a solution. We have even ventured into other taboo areas - discussing health issues, such as autism, mental retardation and mental illness (there is a difference). These too, are situations in which Greek and Greek American families may feel the need to be relieved of bearing their burdens alone, and we want to help them - that's why we're here. We invite professionals to discuss particular issues on our programs. On our program about domestic violence, we had a psychologist examine the emotional aspects, and a lawyer discuss the legal issues."

The phone number for the referral service appears on the screen at the end of each program. "Our programs have had an impact on women," adds Ms. Post. "We get calls after each show, which are recorded, screened, and referred to the appropriate ELPIDES team member. Sometimes women call in and hang up. Even though they don't speak, they are taking the first step in realizing that they need help. We always hope they will call back. They need only leave their first names and phone numbers if they wish anonymity, as some have done."

In the past year, ELPIDES has published a bilingual Greek/English brochure detailing

happens on a second floor, where women can come for counseling and assistance," says Dr. Eva Pappas, a psychologist and vice-president of ELPIDES. "Our first priority is to keep families together whenever possible, and if that is not possible, to discuss other workable options. Sometimes people have to learn how to alter the behavior of an argument to avoid it escalating into a full-scale battle. In other cases people have to learn how to avoid what I call 'toxic people' who bring out the worst in them and make their lives miserable."

Dr. Pappas explains the members' unwavering commitment to ELPIDES as follows:

"Each woman has her own experiences. The need to reach out to other women in crisis has resonated within us. We are women of a common culture and each of us, in some way, has had some needs that were unfulfilled in our lives. This is a common denominator among us. We have been fortunate enough to get beyond this and have successful lives. Some women have not been able to do this. We want to help other women get their lives on the right track. I was going to become a secretary and forget about going to college, when one of my teachers saw my potential and pushed me in the right direction. That made a difference in my life."

ELPIDES hopes to continue helping

Greek and Greek American women and their families by expanding services in the future. This is only possible through continued financial support from the Greek American community.

This past spring, ELPIDES held its first fundraiser "An Evening of Music and Mezetzes" with Tina Santorineou, at Thiasos in New York City. In concluding the fundraiser, Georgia Post summed up the mission of ELPIDES:

"We want to replace despair and the lack of information that leads to despair with 'elpida.' Can any of us imagine how bleak our lives would be without hope? We have our own Greek sisterhood of women now, so that we can reach out to anyone among us who needs help. In this way, our journey into hope will not be a lonely one."

For more information on ELPIDES, or to make a donation, write to: ELPIDES, Inc. P.O. Box 51, New York, NY 10021. For emergency referral service call (in confidence): 718-932-2879.

Susan Kiesel Klerides, a freelance writer, has been writing articles for The Greek American since 1987. "ELPIDES" was published in October 1995. The organization, which continues to grow, has since received a grant which will be used for office space.



abuse, domestic violence, rape, and gambling. ELPIDES is run by volunteers including psychologists, lawyers, social workers, journalists, writers, broadcasters, and homemakers who lend their time and individual areas of expertise.

Paula Gregoriades, a clinical social worker and one of the founders of ELPIDES, reports that "... we are as passionately committed to this cause as we were when we first conceived ELPIDES. We have met and surpassed many of the goals we set out to accomplish. Of course, when we succeed in helping individual women, there is a consequent benefit to their families, and the community as well."

Ms. Gregoriades further points out that "... the response from the Greek American community has been remarkable. One caller said it best, in Greek, 'ELPIDES eprepe na gini' (ELPIDES was meant to happen). We're essentially pioneers ... setting and breaking precedents. There is no organization such as ours, with our scope. The public image of bootstrap success, including strong family stability that Greeks have bettes reality. ELPIDES' underlying premise is quite clear ... Greek women suffer in much the same way that their sisters of other ethnic groups do. Our ethnicity and culture does not shield us from these disturbing experiences."

ELPIDES reaches a large audience of women through its weekly television program "Today's Woman" (*E Gineka Tou Simera*) hosted by Greek radio personality Tina Santorineou, who is also one of the founders of the organization. The program is broadcast on National Greek TV (Channel 65), which airs in the New York City area, every Wednesday at 6:30 pm and Thursday at 12:30 am and 11:30 am, courtesy of Demetris Kastanas. "Because Ms. Santorineou is so well known and loved by the Greek community, she is an ideal person to host the program," says Ms. Post. "The audience can re-

as some have done."

In the past year, ELPIDES has published a bilingual Greek/English brochure detailing services available. ELPIDES Treasurer Emma V. Verdick is reviewing a translation (done by team members) of the official New York State Domestic Violence Booklet. Another booklet from the Alliance for the Mentally Ill has been translated by Angeliki Gena. Also, ELPIDES team members were invited to give testimony on domestic violence in the Greek American community before the Mayor's Council on the Status of Women. This was the first time the Greek American community was represented at an event such as this.

"Greeks have always maintained a good overall image in the larger American community," adds Ms. Gregoriades. "They are considered to be well-educated and industrious. Many people at the Mayor's Council were surprised to discover that Greeks have many of the same family and social problems as other ethnic groups. ELPIDES receives funding from the Office of the Queens Borough President, Claire Schulman, and support from the Community Resource Exchange (CRE), Inc. CRE offers resources and informational services to non-profit organizations such as ELPIDES. A grant writing committee has been established, and with the help of CRE, efforts are being made to submit proposals to foundations that offer financial support to non profit organizations.

"We are still primarily dependent on funding from private donations. ELPIDES needs a 'Godmother' - a woman of independent means who will embrace and help our cause," says Ms. Post. ELPIDES members are working towards their ultimate goal of establishing a Greek women's center to provide counseling and crisis intervention services to women and their families. This would include a domestic violence intervention program for Greekspeaking women.

"Our dream is to have a safe place, per-



KALI ANASTASI

A.F. MORGULIS D.D.S. P.A.

35-08 Morlot Ave.

Fairlawn, NJ 07410

(201) 797-7476

HAPPY EASTER