

HE TAUGHT US TO DANCE

Kathryn V. Lorio

A little bit of Aristotle; a touch of Cavafy; and a nice helping of Zorba the Greek. These epitomize my brilliant Koumbaro and dear friend, Thanassi. He was the quintessential Greek—a philosopher, a poet, and a man with a zest for life.

Thanassi was extremely proud of being Greek and spent a lifetime introducing American faculty and students to the beauty and majesty of the Greek culture. In 1972, he initiated his first summer session abroad in his birthplace, Thessaloniki, Greece, for LSU Law School. He wanted to share his passion for his heritage with his students. Since that time, hundreds of American students and scores of professors, both from the United States and other countries, have tasted the splendor of the Greek culture. Students have had the chance to study law in Greece, being taught by national and international faculty, including United States and Greek Supreme Court Justices. Thanassi gave generously of his time, breaking bread with the students and giving them the opportunity to converse casually with “the great Yippy.” During those sessions, which continue today at both Tulane and Loyola Law Schools, he introduced students directly to the Greek mind set, to the warm people, to the glorious history of a civilization which contributed so much to the world and, of course, to the beautiful breezes which grace the shoreline of the Aegean. Thanassi conveyed the love of his birthplace, not by lecture, but by example. I venture to say that each student who has shared these experiences thinks back fondly on them and has gained a new appreciation of Greece and its people, and consequently has acquired a new perspective on life in general. Many expressed a wish that they themselves could be part of that unique and precious ethos. I would observe Thanassi swell with pride as such comments were made.

Most of you may have read *Zorba the Greek* or have at least seen the movie starring Anthony Quinn. When I think of Thanassi’s many gifts to American students, I recall the last scene of the movie which takes place right by the sea. In that

scene, the relatively uptight Brit played by Alan Bates discards his confining jacket and finally seems to suddenly understand Zorba. Abandoning his reserved demeanor, the Bates character begs to embrace the emotional and sensual aspects of life, as he beseeches Zorba, with these poignant words: "Teach me to dance, will you?" With joy and fervor Zorba complies. Dear, dear Thanassi, we will miss you greatly. We love you. And we thank you sincerely for "teaching us to dance."