

# My big fat Greek festival

BY SARA PORTER

staff editor

Clinical psychologist, Aphrodite Matsakis said that her father had one important rule for her and her brother while they grew up in St. Louis.

"He had a no English rule," Matsakis said. "We were told not to speak any English."

"When I grew older my brother and I had a hard time sticking to the no English rule," she said.

Matsakis shared experiences from her childhood and how they affected her life and career in clinical psychology in a lecture and reading from her book "Growing up Greek in St. Louis" in the Millennium Center on September 14.

Matsakis originally began the book by gathering stories and anecdotes into a small book, which then grew to 400 pages.

"None of the editors wanted a story that long," Matsakis said. "Eventually, I found Arcadia Publishing and they enjoy books on personal histories, particularly on ethnic groups, so they got it." Matsakis was then told to trim the book from 400 to 128 pages and to add photos.

Matsakis wrote her book so that her children could learn about and explore their roots. "When our ancestors were younger they were



Mike Sherwin/The Current

**Aphrodite Matsakis, author of "Growing Up Greek in St. Louis" speaks Saturday at the MSC Saturday evening. Her appearance was sponsored by the Center for International Studies. "The social workers told me that I should hide all Greek books and stuff under the bed, but I couldn't," Matsakis said. "I couldn't hide my grandmother under the bed."**

told to act American, to be American," she said. "When they grew older their children and grandchildren tried to fit in and rejected a lot of their ethnicity."

"Now people are seen exploring their roots," Matsakis said. "People want to cling to something besides the television."

Matsakis also wrote the book to explore a more personal view of history, particularly from a woman's point of view. "You hear people say 'you have history, but where are the women?'" she said. "From personal history you learn about the way people lived and how they interacted."

Matsakis acquired a respect for community, because of the closeness of her neighborhood. "My parents knew of many single Greek men who could babysit for us," she said. "We knew somebody, who knew somebody, who knew somebody."

"We knew there was a dark side of the neighborhood, like gossip," Matsakis said. "But even gossip shows you care. There was a lot of caring, when people looked out for one another."

Matsakis's parents raised her on Greek myths, a trait that she later used in her experiences with Vietnam veterans and survivors of other traumatic experiences, such as the Oklahoma City Bombing. "I had some Vietnam veterans who had trouble revealing their emotions, they were afraid to cry," she said. "I told them the story of Achilles and how he cried so much that the Greeks honored him."

"Achilles was the Rambo of his day and wasn't afraid to show emotions," Matsakis said.

When Matsakis first began to tell myths in her therapy, she was met

with derision. "In a speech six or seven years ago at a Vietnam veterans memorial I told the story of Aurora and the dew," she said. "The next speaker said 'Very nice. Now, hear a real speech.'"

"Now, mythology is used regularly in therapy," Matsakis said. "Books have even been written on the subject."

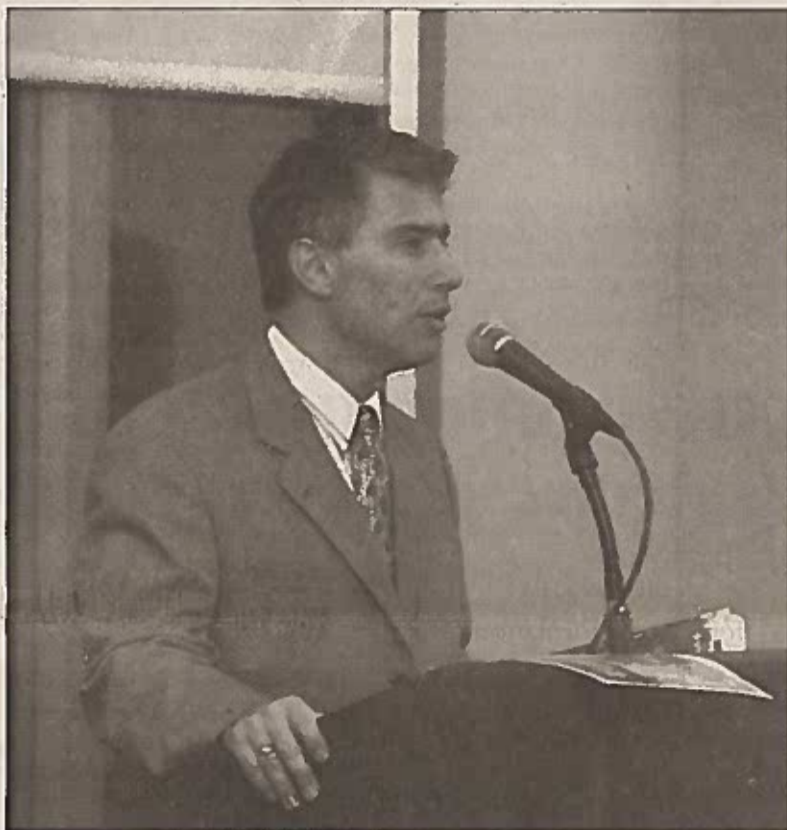
Matsakis said that she learned commitment from her family. "We learned commitment from family, from community, something higher than yourself," she said.

"We also learned not to complain," Matsakis said. "If we complained, we heard about the stories from our parents and grandparents about the hardships they endured."

"My grandma was a survivor of the Holocaust, and another was in the fascist occupation in Greece, and they were sad but did not complain," Matsakis said.

Matsakis's Greek heritage was so important to her that she said that she could not hide it even when she was told to. "When I was going through my divorce, there was a criticism at the courts and they didn't understand Greek Orthodox," she said, "So they thought it was some weird religion."

"The social workers told me that I should hide all Greek books and stuff under the bed, but I couldn't," Matsakis said. "I couldn't hide my grandmother under the bed."



Mike Sherwin/The Current

**Dr. Michael Cosmopoulos, professor of anthropology, introduces author Aphrodite Matsakis Saturday evening at the Millennium Center. Cosmopoulos has been the Hellenic Government-Karakas Foundation Professor of Greek Studies and Professor of Archaeology at UM-St. Louis since August, 2001.**



Mike Sherwin/The Current

**Matsakis speaks about adults finding and learning about their ancestry. "People want to cling to something besides the television," she says.**