



Anna Buckley
STAFF WRITER

In Refina, Greece, Alexea Kouris (10) walked from her house down to the plaza where a local festival was taking place. As she looked down on the ocean from the cliffs, she heard a live Greek band playing and people singing and dancing. Once she made her way into the plaza, she found her family and friends in the crowd and began Greek dancing, a style of dance she has known most of her life.

Kouris visits Greece twice a year to see her grandparents and other family. Her roots are deep within the country and her uncle is the governor of a small area of Greece.

"Having my uncle as the governor isn't that big of a deal because it's just a part of our family," Kouris said. "Getting to see him and the rest of my family while spending time at the beach and in the Greek culture makes visiting Greece such a great trip overall."

Back in the United States, Kouris keeps her heritage as an important part of her life by attending a Greek Orthodox Church, a Greek school on the weekends and Greek festivals annually.

"I just love that I'm so involved with my culture in my everyday life," Kouris said. "A lot of people say, 'Oh, I'm Greek,' but they don't get the full experience. I take a lot of pride in being Greek because it means a lot to me and all of the things we participate in bring our family closer together."

Along with attending a Greek church and Greek school, Kouris has participated in Greek dancing since she was 6 years old.

"Greek dancing is one of those things that I love do-

ing, and it brings me closer to my heritage," Kouris said. Greek dancing has a history within her family, making it that much more special to her.

"My parents really got to know each other through Greek dancing when they first met," Kouris said. "That makes me love Greek dancing even more because I know it's a part of the reason my parents became close."

Greek dance focuses on certain styles from different areas of Greece while portraying the events that occurred in Greek history. The dancers' costumes also represent the different regions of Greece.

"The dance depends on what part of Greece the dance is from," Kouris said. "Some parts will represent villages through laid back kinds of dances. Some will be war scene dances and those are totally different. One can be more of a somber dance and another can be uplifting and cheery. There's a different variety."

Kouris says her favorite type of dance to perform is the emotional war style.

"I like that style because it's more dramatic and the performance requires a more intense emotion," she said. "There's a lot of stomping and harsher movements."

Kouris has been dancing with her current group since she began Greek dancing. The group has grown up together while attending the same Greek Orthodox

church. Currently, Kouris and her dance group are focusing on the styles from Macedonia.

"The Macedonian dances are war dances," Kouris said. "One of the dances that the girls do, called Makrinitsa, represents the war that went on and how the women were walking off a cliff and killing themselves because they didn't want to be killed by the men seizing the city."

Because the dances Kouris and her group perform represent real events that occurred in Greek history, the performances have a special meaning to the group members.

"It's all a serious thing for us," she said. "It impacts us in a way because it's all a part of our culture. Portraying it is close to our hearts and means a lot because it's a part of us."

Kouris and her group perform at the annual Folk Dance Festival (FDF), and have placed third among their division.

"A lot of people are very competitive and it gets pretty intense," Kouris said. "When we go to competitions we don't think about the competition aspect; we think about having fun. We're expressing our culture."

Kouris stood with her group backstage before their first competition at the Folk Dance Festival when she was 12 years old. As her group nervously chatted amongst themselves, Kouris tried to forget about the ballroom filled with people and the judges who sat

right by the stage. Her director came over to the group before they went on and told them one word: "Kefi," meaning "soul" in Greek. Kouris took that one word to heart and put her soul into her dance. They ended up placing third in the competition, the best they have ever placed.

For competitions, Kouris and her group perform two sets of dances, consisting of eight dances which are each about two minutes long.

In preparation for the Folk Dance Festival competitions, Kouris and her group perform at the Greek Festival that her church holds annually.

"At the festivals there's Greek food, performances and live Greek music," Kouris said. "A lot of people who aren't Greek come to it because it's a good way for them to get an idea of our culture."

For Kouris, her dancing is more than just a way of immersing herself in her culture; it's a way of honoring her history.

"Greek dancing is just a part of me and it's natural," Kouris said.

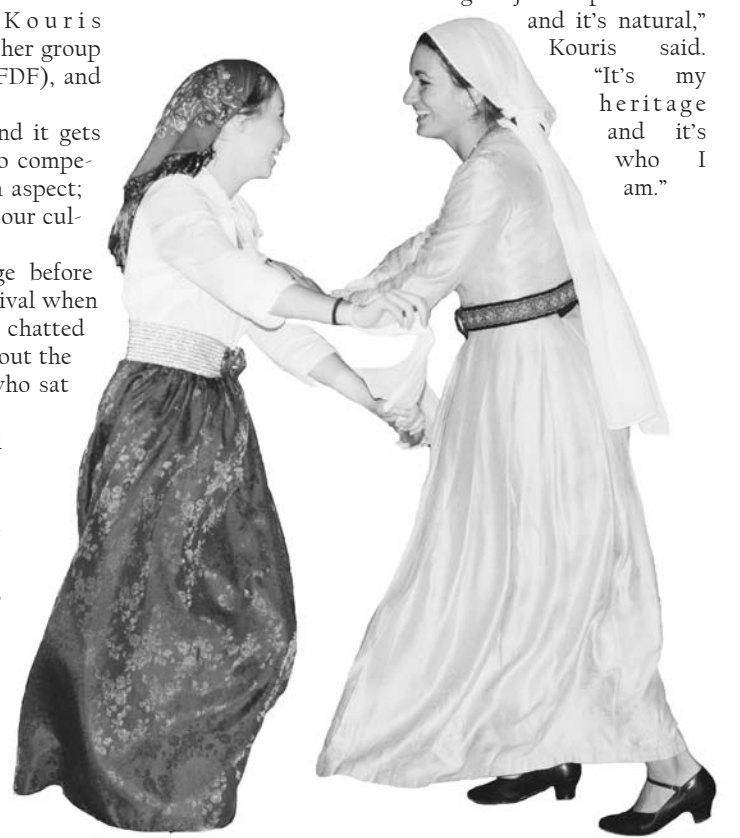
"It's my heritage and it's who I am."

OPA!

Kouris celebrates her culture through dance



Photos by Linea Whitney and Courtesy of Alexea Kouris



Top: Kouris, second from left, performs traditional Greek dancing at a benefit event. Middle Left: Kouris visits Greece with her family. Left: Kouris dances at an FDF competition.

Students abuse medication, sleep less to study more

PILLS, from page 1

She started taking the pills after her friends introduced them to her. Until then, she said she could barely make it through the week without feeling like she was about to collapse from overwork and excessive exhaustion.

"Before, I used to fall asleep on my books all the time," Sarah said. "It was pretty sad. You wake up the next morning and instead of going 'It's a wonderful day,' you're like 'Oh shoot! I didn't finish all my homework.'"

Joyce Adams, a Professor of Clinical Pediatrics at the University of California at San Diego, says that although different from each other, the medications that both Bates and Jason are taking could be detrimental to their health both now and in the future.

"Caffeine and the medication in Adderall are both stimulants," Adams said. "That means they increase alertness, increase heart rate, and can increase blood pressure. Both can cause anxiety and very rapid heartbeats leading, in some cases, to chest pain."

Sarah has felt some effects first-hand.

"It was weird," Sarah said. "Sometimes, my heart would just start racing really randomly, and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm going to die,' before I realized it was the caffeine."

Jason, on the other hand, says he hasn't experienced serious side-effects, but Adams says that Adderall can be extremely harmful if taken without a prescription.

"Adderall and other stimulant medications used to treat Attention Deficient Disorder have been associated with heart problems and sudden death in a small number of cases," Adams said.

Jason said that he isn't too worried about the health effects in the future and enjoys the positive results of it in the present.

"I don't think I take it regularly enough to be addicted to it," Jason said. "It's just something to help you. People don't think about what the negative aspects will be. They just think, 'Hey, I'm going to study better. It's going to help me with my grades. It will make my parents happy, and it will take pressure off of me.'"

When he takes the Adderall, Jason said that everything comes easier to him.

"I'd turn into a robot," Jason said. "That's the analogy I would use, because everything is done perfect. All my handwriting was done neatly, and I got a good grade on the test because I was focused in my studying."

Even so, Adams said that taking Adderall is extremely dangerous.

"These medications should never be used without a doctor's prescription and with close monitoring for side effects and effectiveness in treating the ADHD symptoms," Adams said.

Although Adams says that caffeine is addictive, Sarah says that she doesn't think of the caffeine as a drug in the same way as cocaine and marijuana.

"I don't think I got addicted," Sarah said. "But after awhile of taking them, it was like I had to take more to get the same effect. It was like I had developed immunity."

Adams said that this is common. People who regularly take caffeine pills or Adderall build up a sort of tolerance for the drugs.

"The occasional use of [stimulants], as in three or four times a year to stay awake and study for big examinations is probably

safe for teenagers," Adams said. "But if you [regularly] take medications to stay awake, you'll be tired the next day, and you will feel the need to take even more of the caffeine or medication the next day."

Despite the health problems that may come with Adderall and caffeine pills, ironically, Adams says that the worst negative effect of the two is exactly the reason why students abuse them to prevent sleep.

"Adolescents need eight to nine hours of sleep every night to perform best in both physical and mental activities," Adams said. "Going without sleep can cause mental and behavioral problems such as poor anger control, poor concentration, and depression."

Sarah said the decision to take stimulants is about priorities. For her, the answer is easy. Taking less of a load isn't an option.

"For some people, their health and well-being is more important," Sarah said. "For others, success is more important. Obviously, I want to be successful. I mean, that sounds bad because it sounds like it would be super-extreme. And it is, but I just want to do well. Everyone wants to do well, but this probably

isn't the way to go around doing it."

Adams said she recognizes that the pressure on teenagers is great.

But at the same time, she also said that this pressure on students to take as many AP classes as possible and get the highest GPA could lead to deteriorated mental and physical health in the future, especially when taking stimulants like caffeine or prescription drugs like Adderall.

"I think teens are much healthier if they balance the academic load with physical activities such as sports, drama, music, art and community service," Adams said. "Colleges look at things other than GPA for granting admission."

Although Jason said he would stop taking the pills if the negative effect were life-threatening, his reasons for continuing to take stimulants are similar to Sarah's. It all revolves around school.

"I've never really been a top-tier student," Jason said. "But now it's my junior year and there's this incredible pressure to perform."

*Names have been changed

Winter attends lunchtime piano lessons, bonds with accompanist

Katelyn Hennes
STAFF WRITER

It was just past noon when Victoria Winter (12) entered the choir room on another Wednesday and made her way to the piano bench.

Although she misses lunch and time with her friends, Winter's love for piano makes these weekly lessons worth her time.

Winter began to warm up by working through a rhythm book and clapping out the rhythm of the notes as her teacher, Westview's choir accompanist and assistant, Myra Erickson, looked over her shoulder.

Then they began one of their weekly one-on-one half-hour piano lessons that Winter has attended since August and plans to take until she graduates this year.

Although Winter has played the piano since she could read and has taken many piano lessons, when she was given the opportunity to take lessons at Westview, something only five other choir students do during lunch, she made sure to seize the chance to improve her skills.

"Mrs. Erickson asked if I wanted lessons from her because she had openings after graduation [last year]," Winter said. "I wanted to take the chance while I could get it because she is a good pianist and I want to [play] like her."

Although each lesson costs money and is at lunch, Winter's love for piano and music make it worthwhile.

"I love music and I love to play the piano," Winter said. "Being able to make music is so rewarding."

Winter also makes sure that she practices every day after school for at least a half an hour.

Her main goal is to continue improving on her pieces and become an overall better pianist.

"The best part of playing piano is when I play a part of a piece correctly that I had previously played wrong," Winter

said. "Then [Erickson and I] cheer and clap because I finally got it."

This incentive to improve on her piano playing keeps her focused and pushes Winter's dedication, which, in turn, she says, helped shape her into a more goal-oriented and dedicated person.

"Music presents a challenge that can be overcome," Winter said. "It takes determination and practice every day to get as far as I want."

Currently, Winter is working on a duet piece for her piano recital. This piece will be performed with Erickson on the same keyboard, which she said was hard to get used to at first.

"We both love music and want to play well," Winter said. "But sharing the keyboard is difficult and hard work because there are four hands at once instead of two."

However, practicing every day and working hard toward their common goal has brought Winter and Erickson closer. Although, Winter still thinks of her as a teacher they are now more friendly and open towards each other.

Winter said that each lesson is a lot of fun and that she and Mrs. Erickson often laugh and joke during their time together.

Each lesson starts off with friendly formalities, like asking about each other's day. During the lesson, they will often talk about what Winter wants to achieve, how she can get better, and what Winter would like to play, but they try to keep it light and interesting.

"Mrs. Erickson is a really fun lady," Victoria said. "Our relationship has become closer and friendlier."

Winter said they also enjoy each other's company although their main focus is piano.

"We both have a passion for the piano and music and general," Winter said. "It's a lot of fun to play, but it is also a lot of hard work, but I love music."

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