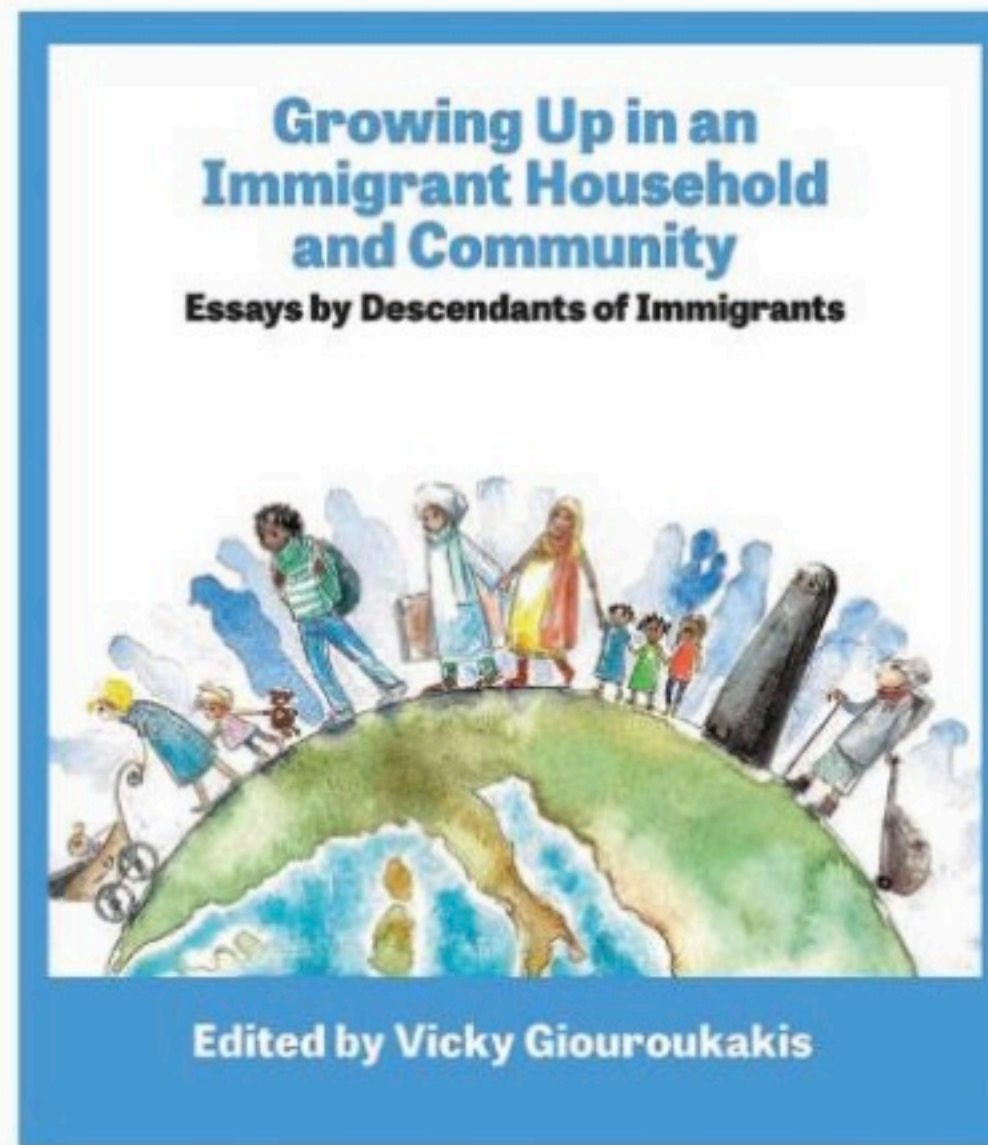


DR. VICKY GIOUROUKAKIS

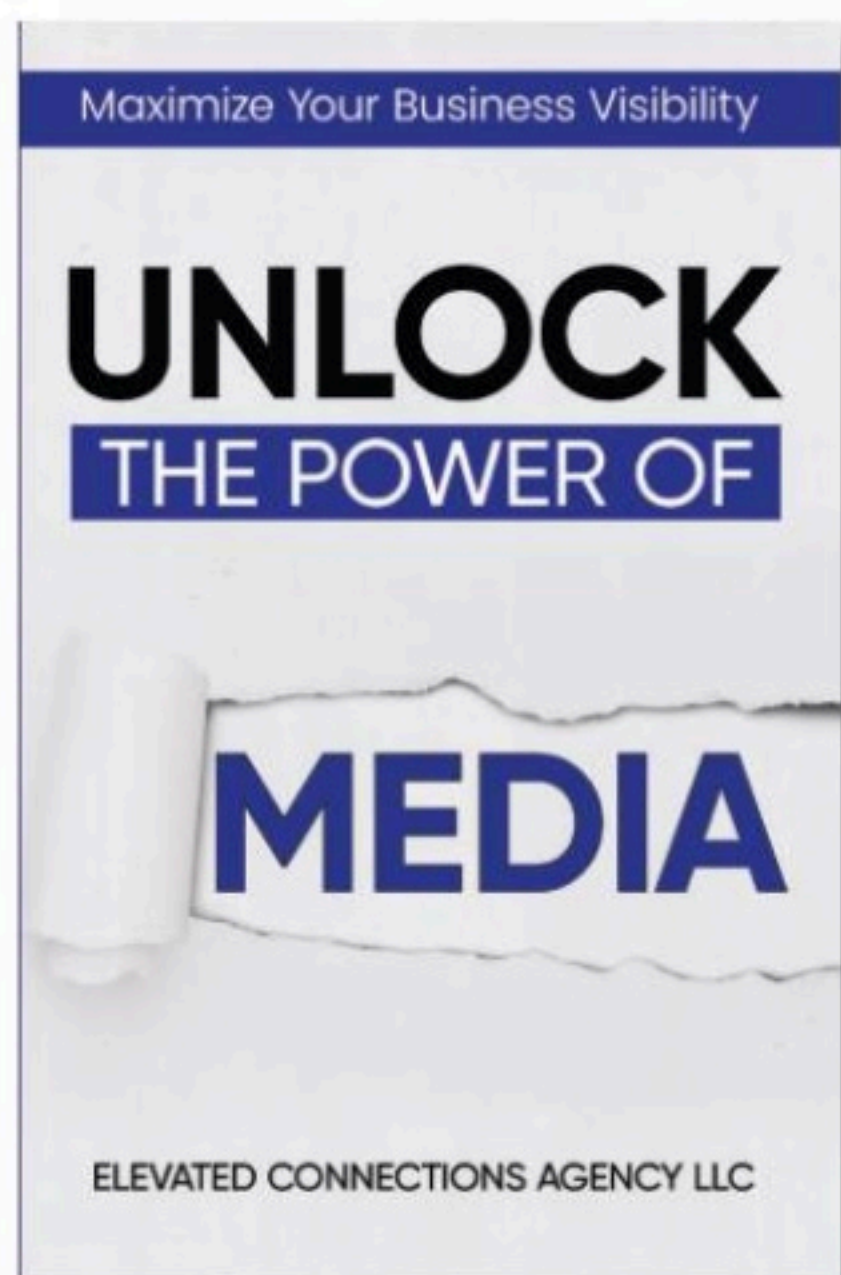
Growing Up in an Immigrant Household and Community Essays by Descendants of Immigrants

Vicky's beautiful collection of essays gives voice to a diverse group of first-generation Americans. Contributing authors come together to tell their intriguing and poignant stories of adversity, good times, and lessons learned, having been raised by immigrant parents and grandparents. Born to Greek immigrant parents, Vicky Giouroukakis expresses her understanding of the unique challenges she and others experience: "Growing up the daughter of immigrant parents is like straddling two worlds, the world of my parents and the world in which I was born."

Giouroukakis teaches and writes with a commitment to and passion for diversity, cultural inclusion, and excellence in education. *Growing Up in an Immigrant Household and Community: Essays by Descendants of Immigrants* is published by Kendall Hunt Publishing Company and available for purchase through Barnes & Noble and Amazon.



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In this dynamic era, harnessing the incredible potential of local media to elevate your business's visibility is critical. Discover the strategies and tactics necessary to effectively navigate the ever-changing media landscape. Connect with journalists, capture the attention of your target audience, and reach new heights of success. Unlock a new world of opportunities, positioning yourself as an expert, sharing positive news via press releases, and pitching your expertise on trending hot topics. Learn how to shine in the spotlight and let your business soar to new horizons. The information in this book will help you get started. You will find yourself revisiting chapter after chapter while working to build media skills. This inspirational, manual-style book is published by Elevated Connections Agency and will be available for purchase September 15, 2023 on Amazon.

Author's Corner



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My Stories as a Form of Therapy

By Vicky Giouroukakis

After the passing of my mother in 2021, I found myself wanting to write about her, my dad, my upbringing, and in general, my life, the way I saw it, shaped by my parents and their sacrifices. Even when my mother was lying in her hospital bed, dying, I felt a need to write a tribute to her, a eulogy, even though I knew that the priest is the only one who says a few words about the deceased at a funeral in Greek Orthodox religion. I sat next to her for two days straight, and continuously typed, all the while praying to God for the words to come to me. The words came to me also in Greek, my mother's tongue, which I adopted over the years and nurtured so that I would be able to connect with her and my heritage. When the time came, the "eulogy" was eventually published as

an announcement in the obituary section of the Greek newspaper.

A few weeks later, I picked up the laptop again and started typing so that I could once again feel a connection to my mother. I started writing about my life from the beginning and realized that what I was writing sounded very much like a boring autobiography. It also lacked focus. I deleted pages and started over again and again. I worked on the piece for days. What did I want to say? I knew I wanted my writing to pay tribute to my immigrant parents and grandparents. The focus of the writing then turned to my father and then back to my life and then to my mother. Whatever I was trying to do wasn't working.

I felt the memory of my mother drifting away.

As a lifelong writer and professor who works with English teachers, I knew that the struggle was part of the writing process. As most people who come to this point experience, I was frustrated and prayed again to God to give me the power of words, exact words that would express whatever it was I was feeling and thinking. I even doubted my writing ability. When was the last time I wrote creative nonfiction? Was I so accustomed to academic writing that I couldn't engage in this other genre? And what genre was I trying to write in? A story, a memoir, or an expository essay? I felt the memory of my mother drifting away. During that time, I would put the work away and then come back to it. Sometimes, I would just write a few sentences or revise a paragraph, or wordsmith; at times, I would devote only five minutes or a full five hours to the work.

A few weeks into some persistent writing, a force, like a planchette on a Ouija board, was guiding me to center on my mother and the passion that defined her to a certain extent: cooking. I wrote an opinion piece reflecting on my mother's preoccupation with feeding people which is a metaphor

for communicating her love to her family, her friends, and the world. The essay depicted Dina Menexas as a force of nature—competent, smart, quick-witted, outspoken, resourceful, and strong. She was a survivor from the age of two when she was orphaned by her father and raised by a determined mother in a small village in Corinth, Greece during the Occupation of World War 2 to the time she beat three different life-threatening diseases to live a longer than expected life. My father had a similar upbringing and met my mother in Athens where they ended up working manual jobs to send money home.

Given my immigrant background, why could I not use my writing to honor and celebrate the unsung heroes in my life, my parents? My parents came to the US for the promise of the American dream, a life full of opportunities. Whatever I have and whoever I have become are largely because of my parents who made sacrifices and saved money so that my brothers and I could have a better life than they did. Throughout the writing process, I would call my brother and ask him to confirm the details about certain events to ensure fidelity to the facts. Those conversations became opportunities to reminisce about the past and laugh and cry at memories wrought with emotion.



How did I fit into the story of my immigrant parents?

↓ After putting my mother's piece to rest (pun unintended), I decided to write a second piece, a flash memoir about my fifth birthday party that took place in our first home, a tiny one-bedroom apartment in Astoria, New York. Like the first, this took multiple drafts to reach a final product, but it was more fun and engaging since I wrote it from the perspective of a child. I wanted to make sure I reflected what my life at that age was like in a diverse, immigrant community in the 1980s—a life where my family didn't have much, but had enough. Our parties were full of life, fun, music, dancing and abundant home-cooked food.

My brothers and I played carefree in the street and used our imagination to build houses out of cardboard and draw board games on the pavement. Our neighbors were our family, store owners knew

us by our first names, and friends were in the same boat as we were—children of hard working, honest people who tried to make a living in this blessed country called America. Our parents taught us the values of hard work, perseverance, drive and modeled for us how to be decent, caring, and well-mannered human beings.

Both writing pieces, albeit fulfilling, still needed an overarching essay to pull everything together. How did I fit into the story of my immigrant parents? How did I perceive growing up in an immigrant household and community? The third and final essay I wrote was about my experiences navigating the different cultural worlds in my life—how I balanced assimilating into American culture while also living in the world of my Greek parents, how I maintained my Greek heritage



Photo credit © Laura Fuhrman

I felt liberated,
reenergized, alive.

and remained grateful for this country and all the opportunities it afforded me. I changed the style of the essay a few times but ended up giving a chronological account of pivotal moments in my life as they related to culture pulled together by the common thread of straddling different cultural worlds.

After enlisting feedback from a few trusted friends, I decided to break up the piece into sections and start each section with a memory which was meant to draw the reader in. The final product took several weeks to finish, but in the end, I was relieved that it was over. I felt liberated, reenergized, alive. I was able to tell my story in a way that satisfied myself and, presumably, the reader.

Writing my stories was a form of therapy for me as it allowed me to process my emotions and thoughts, stay connected to my loved ones, and pay tribute to the immigrant experience. I invite you to start writing your story as everyone has a story to tell and to persevere throughout the process for the benefits are within reach.

Note: The essays were published in my anthology, *Growing Up in an Immigrant Household and Community: Essays by Descendants of Immigrants*, published in 2023 by Kendall Hunt: <https://he.kendallhunt.com/product/growing-immigrant-household-essays-descendants-immigrants>.

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