



Kehila Kedosha Janina

Synagogue and Museum

280 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002

May 2009 e-mail newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

Our apologies for sending this newsletter out late. We have just been so very busy! From a small, humble synagogue on the Lower East Side of Manhattan that the world was ready to forget and many thought should be closed, we've evolved into a center of activity, visited by thousands from around the world. Our special lunch tours have hosted groups from local synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, retirement communities, the Greek Orthodox Church, Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women, United Federation of Teachers NYC, small family reunion groups, along with groups from Philadelphia, Washington DC and Maryland (and that is just from April and early May 2009!). If you are interested in our lunch tour, contact us at kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net. We are already booking for 2010!

**Danny
Lebenstein (son
of Mary Attas
Lebenstein)
&
Sol Kofinas
4/28/2009**



This newsletter is in honor of our beautiful Dora Mazza who will turn 96 on May 30th. Dora is a role model for many of us. Two years ago, at our 5-way Anniversary Gala, Dora did not get off the dance floor. When one of her friends said, "Dora, sit down. You're going to kill yourself," Dora replied, "Don't worry. I'm not ready to die. I'm having too much fun!" Here's to many more years of joy! Xronia Polla kai olla xronia kala!

**Dora Mazza
Pasha Dance
May 3, 2009**

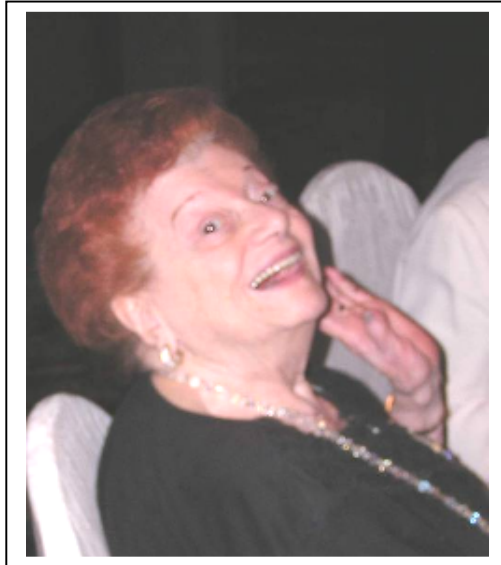


Photo thanks to Elliot Colchamiro.

We celebrate the following birthdays:

**Mollie Bacola Fromm: 90th
Morris Venezia: 80th
Max Nachmias: 80th**

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Jack Matza, brother of Mollie Cohen, past president of the Sisterhood of Janina, and Jack (Carrarra) Askinazi, whose family lived at 283 Broome Street. They will be missed.

We thank Leon Saltiel for the following obituary:

May 4, 2009

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Salamo Arouch, a Greek-Jewish boxer who survived Auschwitz by fighting fellow prisoners, has died.

Arouch died in a nursing home in Israel on April 26. He was 86.

Arouch served as a consultant on the 1989 film "Triumph of the Spirit" about his win-or-die fights staged by the Nazis. It was the first major movie to be filmed on location at the Polish death camp.

He had been a boxing star in his hometown of Salonika before being deported in 1943 to the death camp. Arouch has said he won 208 fights and had two draws during his time in the camp. Each fight continued until one of the competitors died either from the fight or by the gun of a Nazi soldier.

In 1945 he was transferred to Bergen-Belsen until he was liberated by Allied forces. In Israel, Arouch was known as Shlomo. He boxed there as an amateur after fighting in Israel's War for Independence, then opened a shipping and moving business in Tel Aviv.

Responses to April 2009 E-Newsletter

We love to share with you the responses to some of our inquiries from the April 2009 E-Newsletter.

The following picture was printed with the request to help identify the men in the photo:



We received an immediate response from Dr. Michael Matsas that we share with you:

"Dear Marcia,

We wish you also Hag Sameach.

I found the attached photo in your current newsletter: We also have a copy of the same picture. You were asking who they were. These three men are my cousins. They are sitting in front of my grandfather Naoum Matsas' shop in Ioannina opposite the wall of the old city. My grandfather produced wine and cheese and had a small cafe in front of the shop.

From left to right they are Jeshua (Youssa) Matsas, Eliasof Matsas, and Mihalís Valais (perhaps a nickname?). This photo was taken just after the Germans left Ioannina and after the demobilization of the partisans of ELAS. They had all escaped from the German convoys after the Jews were arrested on March 25, 1944.

Standing is Eliasof Matsas, who died in Beersheva last year. On the left is Yeshua Matsas who died in Beersheva a few years ago. On the right (with the mustache) is

Mihalis Valais who died after a beating by former German collaborators in Ioannina in 1945 or 1946.

Congratulations for all of your efforts.

Love, Mike"

Thank you Michael for your help!

In response to the new photos for "Our Gang", Steve Mazza recognized who the "and friend" was standing alongside Matty Matsil. It was his father! We share Steve's comments because we love them:

"Hi Marcia....these newsletters are excellent.....I print them and give my mother a copy and she really loves to read them...she is living in an assisted living facility here in Dartmouth MA...anyway...FYI...on the last page of the April newsletter...the photo that reads Matty Matsil and friend...the friend is my father...Ben Mazza.....!"

Steve Mazza"

Jerry Pardo was overjoyed to see the photo of the Mazza/Mioni family and to see his "nona" in the photo.

As requests come in from around the world, we continue our quest to answer questions many archival photos may pose.

The photo below was taken when Anna Moise Barouch was being honored. We are looking to identify individuals in the photo.



Additions to our Website

Additional photos of "Our Gang" continue to come in and they will shortly be added to our website. Jack Attias contributed photos of his family who served, not only in the US Army in WWII but, also in the US Army in WWI and in the Greek Army during the Balkan Wars. Among those photos Jack submitted, two from WWII are shown below.



Abe Isaacs



Al Yomtov

We are very grateful for wedding photos submitted by both Jack Attias and Elaine Ioannou. Remember, we are gathering wedding photos (from Greece and the USA) for our upcoming exhibit at Kehila Kedosha Janina due to open November 2009.



Avraam Attias and Mollie Isaacs 1928

Sophie Yohanán & Albert Moss (Mussey)



One of the most touching photos we received this month is of Solomon Confinos, born in Ioannina, who was killed by the SS in 1941 as he was returning from fighting on the Albanian Front. We thank Jack Attias for this photo.



Our Museum Director, Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos will be the guest speaker at an evening celebrating Greek Jewry at Beth Am Synagogue in White Plains. There is still time to attend the event. Information is below.

**Bet Am Shalom
Invites you to a Greek-Jewish Dinner with Guest Speaker
Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos**

**SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2009
6:00 PM**

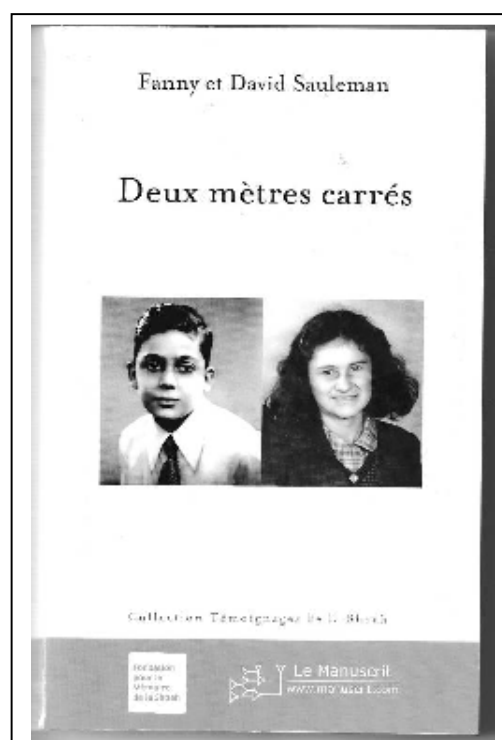
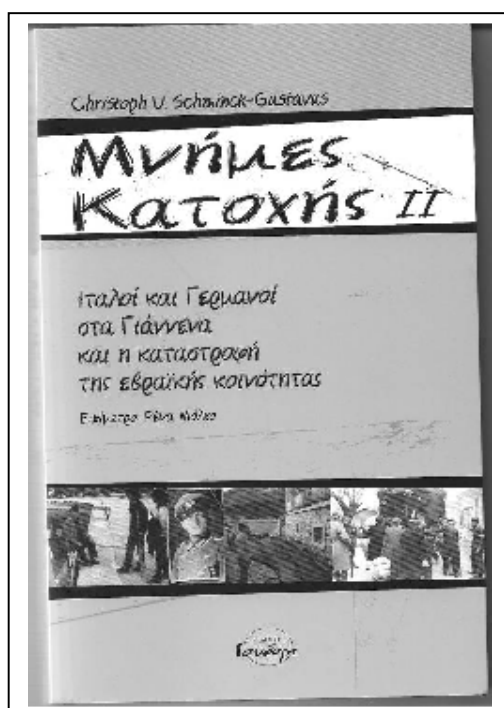
**Enjoy appetizers, beverages, and a delicious dinner in the spirit and style of the
Romaniote Jews**

\$36.00 PER PERSON

**MARCIA HADDAD IKONOMOPOULOS, director of Kedosha Janina Museum on the
Lower East Side of New York, will be our guest speaker. Please RSVP to the BAS
office, by [email](#) or (914) 946-8851, no later than MAY 11.**

New Book Releases

Two new books telling the story of Greek Jewish experience have recently been released. The first, in Greek, "*Memories of the Occupation II: The Italians and the Germans in Ioannina and the Destruction of the Jewish Community,*" by Christopher V. Schminick-Gustavos, published by Isnafi Publishing in Ioannina, with an epilogue by Rena Molho, is a disturbing account of the mechanisms of destruction of the Jewish Community of Ioannina as told through eye-witness accounts. New, never-before-published information appears in the book. We lament the fact that the book is in Greek and, therefore, many will be unable to read this very important book.



Also, recently published in France, is a fascinating true account of the survival of two French Sephardic Jews. Below, we share our correspondence with the son-in-law of one of the writers of the book, in the hope that the French-speaking audience of our newsletter will be made aware of this important book and, possibly, interest will be generated for translating the book into English and, thereby enabling it to reach a larger audience:

"Dear Mrs. Haddad Ikonomopoulos,

Hag Sameach.

My wife's cousin in Israel, Yehuda Hatsvi, suggested that we contact you. We are hoping you might help us announce a new book written by my in-laws, Fanny and David Sauleman, and just published through the French Holocaust Memorial Foundation: <http://www.fondationshoah.org/FMS/spip.php?article843>.

My father-in-law's family was from Salonica and the book is in part Holocaust memoir and in part a history of the migration of Salonican Jews. (His family left Salonica for France in 1930-- almost all were killed in WWII-- and he survived as a hidden child.) Since the book is written in French, we are trying to reach French readers outside of France....

As a Holocaust memoir, the book is rather unique because it uses the family's 77 letter correspondence with their fathers in the Drancy Camp outside of Paris (some written in Djudeo) to help describe what was taking place and the book extensively documents the personal stories with photographs and historical records found in national archives as well as family photographs and documents rescued after the war. These include pictures of the family in Salonica and Greek records such as mortgage payments for the 1922 purchase of the family's electric installation store and an age attestation for WWI military service signed by Rabbi Meir (the future Grand Rabbi of Palestine.)

The book's reference information is:

Fanny and David Sauleman, Deux metres carres (Paris: Editions le Manuscrit, 2009) <http://www.fondationshoah.org/FMS/spip.php?article843> available through: <http://www.manuscrit.com/Book.aspx?id=12530> or <<http://www.amazon.fr>>

In French, the title means "Two Square Meters" and is explained on page 19:

"When we lose those dear to us, we go to the cemetery to honor and remember them and we pray before the place where they are buried.

Two square meters is the area occupied by a grave.

For our parents and most of the members of our families, all murdered by the Nazis, we do not have a place where we can go to pay our respects and pray.

In order to honor them, not to forget them and to perpetuate their memory for future generations, Fanny and I decided to write this retrospective and title it:

Two Square Meters

To page through this book is to remember them and to pay respect before the two square meters that they were denied."

Please let me know if you have any other suggestions for publicizing the book in the US (or suggestions for a US publishing partner.)

*Best regards,
Joel Reidenberg"*

If you would like to communicate directly with Joel on this matter, contact us at kehila_kedoshajjanina@netzero.net and we will put you in touch with him.

We congratulate our friends on their achievements

Sarah Aroeste is now concentrating very seriously on her Cuban Jewish Music Library Project— In Sarah's words *"I'm building 8 Jewish music libraries across the island. It's been an incredible experience! And I'm recording my third CD right now— a collection of all original Ladino songs I've written, along with a Cuban collaborator. Very exciting....we hope the release will be in June... I'll keep you posted!"*

Check out www.saraharoeste.com

*Best,
Sarah"*

Bravo Sarah!

Stella Levi was recently highlighted in an article in the Jerusalem Post. Those of us who have the honor of knowing Stella, applaud her continued contributions to the Sephardic world. We re-print the article below. There are numerous errors and, unfortunately, as always, the Jerusalem Post is more concerned with drama than with accuracy, but "ti na kanoume!"

"It's time they knew our names'

Apr. 16, 2009

STACEY MENCHEL , THE JERUSALEM POST

Standing side by side the women looked identical: malnourished, skeletons - a mere shadow of the vibrant mothers, daughters, and sisters they had been not so long ago. As they lined up for another inspection, Stella Levi stood close to her sister Renee, her constant confidante, hoping to help her decipher the piercing German commands. The guards handled them like livestock, inspecting for sickness and abnormalities. What distinguished Levi the most, her language and culture, was of very little interest to the Nazis. In the camps, concepts of Greek, Italian, German and Russian were erased. All Jews were prisoners destined for the same violent end. In the roar of foreign sounds, Levi's Sephardi voice, her musical Judeo-Spanish, was silenced.

Hearing a rustling, Levi woke up in the middle of the night. She did not comprehend the whispering, but the shifting under her bed was all too familiar. They were stealing her bread again. To Polish Jews, Levi, since she did not speak Yiddish, was an easy target. She sat up quickly, trying to stop them, but they had already scurried back to their beds. From some corner of the darkness, a trickle of laughter shot out. "Greek," they laughed, "stupid Greek."

Stella Levi experienced Auschwitz differently from other Jews. She was lost in translation. Born on the island of Rhodes in 1926, Levi grew up speaking Ladino. Contrary to the belief of many at the camp, she was not Greek, she was Rhodian; and even more importantly, she was Sephardi. Her family descended from the glorious courts of medieval Spain. Yet in Auschwitz, dominated by German- and Yiddish-speaking Jews, Levi was part of a minority. Her Mediterranean heritage became a source of pain. The kapos harassed her, and other Ashkenazi Jews took advantage of her limited German. "They were such peasants," she recalls, the old dividing lines still vivid for her. "I knew so much about the Ashkenazi culture, the Jewish scholars in Lithuania and Germany, and they knew absolutely nothing about me."

To this day, the Sephardic voice of the Holocaust remains silent. Due to the larger numbers of Eastern European victims, the Shoah has been retold as a European story - an Ashkenazi story. The tragedy of the Holocaust, however, almost completely destroyed the Sephardi communities of the Mediterranean. Levi's family was among the estimated 400,000 Sephardi Jews deported to the Nazi death camps. The largest groups came from Greece, the Balkans, Bulgaria, Holland, Italy and its territories in Rhodes and Corfu. There were 57,000 Jews from the Greek city of Salonika alone. Of the close to 2,000 Jews sent from Rhodes, only 151 survived.

As the survivors quickly disappear, Levi's story takes on an added significance, because the Sephardi experience of the Holocaust still lacks the memorial infrastructure - museums, monuments, works of literature - that keep the Ashkenazi story alive. According to Prof. Seth Ward of the Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies at Denver University, while the Ashkenazi communities suffered a larger loss of people, certain Sephardi communities, such as Rhodes, experienced an even more complete version of the Final Solution. Due to their smaller size, the Sephardi communities occupied by the Nazis were completely destroyed, while proportionately more of the Ashkenazi community remained.

The small number of Sephardi survivors helps to explain the lacuna of information on the Sephardic experience of the Shoah. Ward feels, however, that the event has been memorialized through Ashkenazi eyes. He states, "The lower visibility of the Holocaust outside of Europe goes beyond issues of documentation and disparities in the size of the communities affected. It reflects the centrality of the Central and Eastern European narrative." Ward emphasizes the need to expand the knowledge of the Sephardi experience of Shoah. He states, "If the Holocaust is important, it is important to record and analyze as much of the Holocaust as possible. Yet, in most places, the history of the Sephardim is nearly invisible."

In 1944, the Nazis killed Levi's family, destroyed her community and shattered her sense of belonging. Levi's treatment in the Holocaust, especially the condemnation by her Ashkenazi coreligionists, created layers of resentment, and to this day she seems lost in the Jewish world. She feels most at home somewhere that no longer exists, the Jewish quarter of Rhodes.

According to 17th-century Karaite traveler Samuel Ben David, Rhodes, with its warm climate, lush greenery, and delicious fruits "in a word... is paradise." Close to the Anatolian coast of Turkey, with easy proximity to Alexandria, Egypt, the island holds a strategic location in the Mediterranean Sea, and thus has been conquered and reconquered throughout the centuries.

In 1523, the Ottoman Turkish sultan encouraged the settlement of a group of Sephardi Jews that had been exiled from Spain with the passage of the Inquisition and Edict of Expulsion in 1492. Speaking Ladino, a hybrid of medieval Castilian Spanish and Hebrew, this group came to call themselves the Rhodeslies. These merchants and traders held onto their Iberian culture, merged with the Turkish and Greek influences around them and created the vibrant Jewish community of Levi's past.

Levi grew up in La Juderia of Rhodes, the designated Jewish quarter on the island close to the northern port. Under Ottoman rule, the Jews were dhimmi, a protected people, paying taxes to the government in order to rule themselves on the island. While occasional persecution existed, Rhodeslies lived peacefully in the Turkish Empire. They had freedom to conduct business, worship in public, and speak and educate in the Ladino language.

Rhodian Jews connected strongly to Sephardi tradition. Music dominated religious services, and Ladino melodies, romanceros, could be heard often in the streets. The proximity of Jerusalem also deepened Jewish identity. Levi's relatives traveled often to the holy city, and two generations of her forefathers were buried there.

As a cosmopolitan port city, Rhodes had contact with Europe and the Levant for centuries. The Italian occupation in 1912, however, augmented European influence. Levi attended an Italian school, and studied Latin, ancient Greek, philosophy and Italian literature. Even under Italian rule, Levi felt safe as a Rhodian Jew. In her young mind, the Rhodeslies community seemed permanent; she was stunned when her freedom was taken away.

SUCCUMBING TO pressure from Hitler in 1936, Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini passed a series of anti-Semitic racial laws. Under this oppressive legislation, Rhodian Jews could no longer hold governmental positions and were eliminated from the state's educational system. It became forbidden for Jewish doctors to treat patients of the "pure" Italian race.

With the surrender of the Italians to the Germans on September 8, 1943, the situation in Rhodes deteriorated. Rhodes was attacked from both sides as the Allies, in an attempt to destroy German ships in the port, dropped many bombs in La Juderia. On Pessah in 1944, 26 Jews were killed as an Allied plane dropped a bomb on the Calle Ancha, meters from the synagogue.

Soon after, the deportation occurred on August 3, 1944. Stella, her sister Renee, her mother and father arrived in Auschwitz after 10 days of brutal boat and cattle car travel. "We were in such awful condition after the trip, and we understood so little because very few people spoke Ladino." She was separated from her parents immediately. She remembers in the first few days, ironically singing Italian songs like *Mama sono tanto felice* ("Mother, I'm so happy") in hopes that another family member might hear and sing back.

Her parents were killed upon arrival, yet Stella and Renee remained together throughout their time in the concentration camps. The companionship proved essential for both women's survival. Levi also befriended a group of French Jewish women, and because of the linguistic proximity of Italian, Ladino and French, the girls could easily communicate.

The Eastern European Jews, however, treated Levi as a foreigner. "Many of the Ashkenazim did not accept us. To them, if you didn't speak Yiddish, then you weren't Jewish. They didn't think the Jewish world existed outside of their shtetl." Levi lamented the rejection and loneliness she felt. Her beloved Ladino only marginalized her further among her own people.

After only three months, Stella and Renee were transferred. The women were sent to a series of other camps in Germany, as the Nazis fled the impending victory of the Allies. On April 16, 1945, the Americans liberated Levi and her sister at Landsburg, a satellite camp of Dachau.

While clearly joyous about her freedom, Levi would soon discover, even family could not fill the void created by the deportation from Rhodes. The sisters spent the first year in Italy, staying with relatives in Rome and Florence, before deciding to move near family in Los Angeles. Levi suffered from extreme culture shock in America. "I was just lonely in this time," she recalls. "I didn't think I ever wanted to go back to Europe, because Europe killed my family. But, ultimately, Europe was all I knew." After three years of feeling unsettled, Stella and Renee decided to move to New York after reconnecting with Italian Jewish friends. Cosmopolitan and international, it was the right fit for Levi, and 59 years later, she remains.

DESPITE MARRIAGE to an Ashkenazi, Levi's resentment toward the Ashkenazim deepened over time. She felt invisible in the Ashkenazi-dominated city of New York. Levi recalls the lack of sympathy she received from Holocaust aid groups. "They only helped each other," she says of the Ashkenazim. "They considered me Greek and didn't give a single penny." There were no official Sephardic organizations for survivors, thus Levi had to organize her own compensation. She received restitution from the German Claims Conference in the 1980s, almost 20 years after most Eastern European survivors.

In 1977 Levi returned to Rhodes for the first time and, soon after, she became one of the main proprietors of the Jewish Museum of Rhodes. Due to the lack of public history about the Sephardic experience, Levi feels especially passionate about her work with the museum. "It is tragic the exhibits are so incomplete in Washington and Israel. Now finally there is some more information on Greece, but there is still so little on Rhodes," she notes.

While the Rhodes museum sees up to 75 people a day in its high season, it does not have the impact of the bigger museums in the US, Europe and Israel. "It seems to many that our stories don't count," she laments. "But people need to know about the Sephardim. It is time that people know our names."

We congratulate our dear friend, Heinz Kounio, and applaud the honor he recently received (March 29, 2009). As reported by his daughter, Hella Matalon, articles appeared in both Kathimerini and Avriani, referring to the ceremony and medal awarded Heinz for his decades of work on gathering the names of the murdered Jews of Salonika, a work that will soon be published in English by the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki. Heinz, himself a survivor of the camps, has dedicated over 40 years of his life to research the names of those lost, so that their names would be inscribed somewhere for eternity



**Kounio Family before WWII
Heinz, Salvator, Hella and Erika**

Our dear friend Vincent Giordano, in Greece on a Fulbright, has brought his documentary film "Before the Flame Goes Out" to Ioannina. The project, which portrays the Romaniote Jewish community with photos, film and oral histories, has been continually supported by Kehila Kedosha Janina. We are exceedingly proud of Vincent's accomplishments.



Photo taken by Vincent Giordano during Rosh HaShanah gathering in Ioannina (2006).

Items of Interest

Greece included in Israeli Genealogical Data Base as reported by our friend Mathilde Tagger in Jerusalem.

Go to: <http://www.isragen.org.il/siteFiles/1/473/5806.asp>

Look for the country: Greece.

As a follow-up to the unfortunate decision in the Greek court of appeals to overturn Greek anti-Semite's Costas Plevris conviction: Greek court vindicates Nazi Costas Plevris – MFA states he insulted Greek people as a whole

The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson George Koumoutsakos answered a related question in a briefing on 8 April 2009:
(http://www.mfa.gr/www.mfa.gr/Articles/en-US/10042009_ALK1803.htm):

"Mr. Karakostas: And a second question. We are coming in for criticism as a country regarding the acquittal of Mr. Plevris – whether you have any comment on that.

Mr. G. Koumoutsakos: Extremist views like those expressed by the person to whom you referred do not represent and do not correspond to the beliefs and feelings of the Greek people, as set down in perfect clarity and authoritatively by the Hellenic Parliament in the resolution declaring 27 January Holocaust Remembrance Day. I would add, in fact, that extremist views such as these essentially insult the Greek people as a whole; a people who fought with all their power against the Axis powers, against the forces of Nazism and fascism."

Finally, some interesting findings that might explain Greek longevity:

Weekend Edition Saturday, May 2, 2009 · *"Making it to 90 years old is awe-inspiring in much of the world. But on a tiny Greek island in the North Aegean Sea, nonagenarians barely merit a second glance.*

The island of Icaria could be the newest of the world's so-called blue zones — places where residents have unusually long life spans. Dan Buettner has crossed the globe many times over the years in search of blue zones, and he recently teamed up with AARP and National Geographic to study Icaria. Buettner and a team of demographers work with census data to identify blue zones around the world. They found Icaria had the highest percentage of 90-year-olds anywhere on the planet — nearly 1 out of 3 people make it to their 90s.

Plus, Buettner says, "They have about 20 percent lower rates of cancer, 50 percent lower rates of heart disease and almost no dementia." "Our life spans are about 20 percent dictated by our genes, Buettner says. The rest is lifestyle. People in Icaria live in mountain villages that necessitate activity every day. "They have gardens," he says, for example. "If they go to church, if they go to their friends' house — it always occasions a small walk. But that ends up burning much more calories than going to a gym for 20 minutes a day."

"They also have a diet that's very interesting," Buettner continues. "It's very high in olive oil; it's very high in fruits and vegetables." "It's also very high in greens; about 150 kinds of veggies grow wild on the island. "These greens have somewhere around 10 times the level of antioxidants in red wine." And though they live on an island, Icarians don't eat much fish. Buettner says pirates pushed the culture up in the highlands and villagers couldn't depend on the sea as much as might be expected.

Particularly unusual to this new blue zone are the villagers' drinking habits. Tea drinking, that is. Icarians drink herbal teas every day, morning and night, Buettner says. This seems to be one of their secrets to longer living.

"We had five of these herbal teas sent to Athens and analyzed for their chemical composition," Buettner reports. "We found out that most of them were diuretics." "It turns out that diuretics actually lower blood pressure," he says, "so when you're chronically lowering blood pressure every day with these herbal teas, that does help explain why there's lower rates of heart disease." "That's something we haven't seen in Okinawa or Costa Rica or Sardinia or any of the other blue zones," Buettner says."

We thank Dora Georgeady for this article.

Stay well and stay in touch. Continue to send us your news, photos, family info and comments.

Kehila Kedosha Janina e-newsletter: number 16: May 2009
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