

## Gelbe Berge Griechenlands – About the Book

It's been more than 20 years now since *Gelbe Berge Griechenlands* (*Yellow Mountains Of Greece*) has been published. Actually it came out the same year the Wall came down in a country that doesn't exist anymore but was then called German Democratic Republic. After periods of inner growing and reflecting I feel qualified enough to write about *Gelbe Berge Griechenlands*. Maybe I am able to say something useful about the background of its creation not just because I have discussed it with author Vasna Ingrid Trupis so many times but also I witnessed its writing process from the very beginning.

The original manuscript was about 300 pages long, more a novel than the novella it became in the end. There were a lot of cultural restrictions and ideological prejudices and censorship was a part of everyday life in the German Democratic Republic during the 1980s. As a matter of fact it needed a lot of encouragement by close friends and other people to get this book published anyway.

But what was so subversive about this story that, from the government's point of view, it had to be changed and shortened? On one hand the story was perceived as ideologically not correct for it was the story of an immigrant whose home country Greece was on the other side of the Iron Curtain (many of these Greek immigrants had left the G.D.R. since the beginning of the 1980s) on the other hand the story was too personal which made it too political. Does that sound complicated to you? Let me explain.

Coming from a multicultural family of mountain climbers, geologists, and artists Ingrid was not uneducated enough to fit the official stereotype of a working class girl. With this familiar background and no political connections she had no chance to start any artistic career in the G.D.R. Moreover she was married to an immigrant from the other side of the Iron Curtain. She was what was called "politically inadmissible".

My father Stavros Troupis (who died in 2008) came to the German Democratic Republic around 1956 after he had been smuggled out of Northern Greece in a basket on a donkey's back. This all happened after World War II when Greece was drowned in a horrible civil war. Staying in Greece would have meant his death. Presumably he was 8 or 9 years old when this happened. He never got to know the exact date of his birth. And it took more than 3 decades to get an official birth certificate not to speak about nationality and civil rights. For more than 3 decades he had been stateless.

Before he died he told me that he and his mother Kiriakula had visited his father Janeto in prison when he was a little boy. My father's parents were partisans. Presumably his father was executed. His mother escaped to Bulgaria and survived in Exile for a couple of years. I never met my Greek grandparents. But I got to know my German grandparents, which leads back to Ingrid's artistic interests.

As a young man Ingrid's father Bambi Gimmel was going to become an artist when Hitler became chancellor of Germany. Bambi grew up climbing mountains and meeting people like Otto Griebel and Hans Herzing. He was talented and hard working but he was not allowed to study at the Art Academy because of his Jewish mother Jenny Laurenza Levy. So instead of becoming an artist Bambi developed the art of surviving and keeping dignity under adverse circumstances. Drawing and painting helped him to do so.

One generation later something similar happened to his daughter Ingrid Irene Gimmel who wanted to study at the Academy of Fine Arts Dresden but was not allowed because she was no working class girl, married to a Greek man, and pregnant for the second time. Academy or not she went on developing the art of surviving trying hard to keep dignity under adverse circumstances. Drawing and writing helped her to do so.

Historical events can create an enormous pressure on individuals. Is it possible to keep dignity under adverse circumstances? Life is definitely more than surviving physically and *Gelbe Berge Griechenlands* is not just the story of a Greek immigrant living in the G.D.R. It is also the story of Ingrid and Stavros Tr(o)upis, and their complicated kind of love in the times of Cold War.