

The new generation's outlook

By Youth Reporter Elise Isakov



Every Labor Day weekend since before I could remember, my family has traveled from our home in Atlanta to a faraway midwestern city to participate in the annual MPO Convention. Hundreds of people would convene in large halls that lay within even larger hotels. I can now look back on my younger years and recall fondly all the adventures I had. I can vividly see myself chasing my new friends down the long hotel hallways, playing tag and hide and seek. The photo room always seemed to be the best place to hide, as the long white table clothes made for perfect cover. As much as I enjoyed the time running around, I was always drawn back to the music that flowed out of the convention hall and resounded off the walls. I remember the way that me and my sisters would clumsily trip over one another attempting to dance the traditional dances. Despite our constant failings in getting the steps just right, we would always race out onto the dance floor when the next song played.

As I return each year I find that the playfulness of before always remains within the friends that I have made and held onto all these years. But as I have aged and reached closer to adulthood I have been able to analyze the impact of the convention on me in a different light. Those picture galleries that were once the ultimate playground have changed. Instead of paying attention to the best tables to hide under, I stand eye to eye with the faces of so many MPO members, who have participated in these conventions long before I ever did. You can look closely and see the pride that emanates from their eyes. Not just pride in themselves but pride that they feel for their country and the legacy that they hope to pass on to the coming generations. I see the hope that they have for coming generations to keep this tradition alive, and I feel a sense of responsibility in doing this.

All of the friends I have made, my sisters and cousins, we all represent the new generation. We are the ones entrusted with keeping the legacy of our ancestors alive, just as our parents have; we are the future of the MPO.

When I first met Paul Topalov, all I knew was that he sang the MPO National Anthem Eesgray Zora each year. Once being introduced I found that we had a lot in common, along with being the same age, we both had a passion for music. But where I liked listening to music, Topalov actually had a gift in playing it, and currently plays with the Skimos band. Not only that, but he is also able to speak Macedonian, which is fascinating.

The MPO Convention means a lot to Topalov.

"It's a place to see friends and family, to listen to our traditional music, and to celebrate our heritage," Topalov said.

He also feels that our generation needs to step up.

"The younger generation, like us, needs to preserve our culture and heritage by being active in the Macedonian community," Topalov said

Nadia Chitkushev, before last year also seemed but only a face I associated with the singing of Eezgray Zora at the banquet. Since then, I've found that she is a very talented individual, and like Topalov, knows how to speak the native language, Macedonian, proficiently. She can also be seen lighting up the dance floor, leading even the adults through complex dances, glittering handkerchief in hand.

Her profound connection to the Macedonian community and knowledge of the history and customs was inspiring to say the least. It made me wish I had paid similar attention to the little details surrounding our traditions.

"Keeping tradition is important because it reminds us where we came from." Chitkushev said, "some of the songs we sing and dances we dance are unique to the MPO because we have done such a good job of preserving them so far, and it would be sad to lose them because so many (people) described so well the struggles and joys that our ancestors have faced throughout their lives."

Older members of the generation share many of our same sentiments.

Alex Tsakoff, who recently graduated from Central Michigan University, and is going to start working as a teacher, feels a profound connection to the heritage, and has future plans to continue the legacy of his Grandparents.

"(The MPO Convention) means the world to me because my Baba and Dedo have been going since the late 1960's. It's a tradition in my family that I hope to carry on with my future family, and I really enjoy it because it's a part of my heritage." Tsakoff said, "Macedonian dancing makes the convention really special!"

If you look back just one generation, to that of my father and his friends, their prolonged friendship led their kids to share the same bond of friendship. My father, Alexander Isakov, and Michael Tsakoff, Alex's father, were childhood friends growing up. Subsequently, we became introduced at a young age, and essentially grew up together.

We all share the hope that one day our children will share in the experiences that we have.

In order to accomplish this goal, Chitkushev has some construct ideas that could be used to keep the spirit of the MPO alive into the future.

"To continue preserving our Macedonian heritage it is important to get the younger generations involved in the organization," Chitkushev said, "In order to do this I suggest we reinstate the YMPO. This would allow young people of the organization to get to know each other and create a community that will last throughout their lifetime."

Tsakoff has a deep love for this organization and awaits its success in the future.

"I don't know what I would do without the MPO Conventions on Labor Day weekend." Tsakoff said, "I think our generation is going to have to find a way to become involved, and carry on what our ancestors have started."

Elise Isakov is a high school junior.

To be considered for her column contact the MPO office at 260-422-5900 or mtfw@macdonian.org.