

AT RANDOM

by Elly Economou

Three basic necessities

At the beginning of fall term, President Niels-Erik Andreassen presented the J. N. Andrews Medallion to Professor of Biblical Languages Elly Economou on the occasion of her retirement from full-time teaching at Andrews University. The following is an edited manuscript of her acceptance comments.

It is with surprise, humility and appreciation that I accept this high honor of Andrews University. I accept the award not only for myself, but also for my colleagues, who share so much of the responsibility and the skills of imparting motivation, creativity, spirituality and character-modeling.

Searching deep in my heart, I promise to do something more to deserve the award, except to retire! Full retirement is still not a part of my work-till-you-drop mental spectrum, and I had hoped to teach until they bulldoze Griggs Hall! But perhaps the old building may be tired of seeing me day in and day out for 32 years during which I taught in the two departments sheltered under its roof—the modern languages and the religion departments (Gift of Languages downstairs, Spirit of Prophecy upstairs!). I am content I will be able to continue teaching less, and it's probably more than a happy coincidence that I am joyfully ushered out before the new millennium will be ushered in.

As I reflect on my early childhood in Greece, I am reminded of the happy days I shared in my close-knit family—I felt secure, sheltered and loved. From my hilltop home, on warm, moonlit nights, amidst jasmine and rose perfume, I could look out at the twinkling lights of Thessalonica below. On other nights my family entertained company, long after we children had been tucked into bed. But we found it hard to sleep while the music outside our open windows entertained our parents and their guests with Greek wine flowing abundantly into sparkling glasses around the merry, noisy pavilion.

On one such occasion I remember one of Father's friends saying that for a person to be happy, three things are basically needed—to be in the place he loves, to be with the people he loves and to do the work he loves.

This formula was deeply engraved in my mind, and in the innocence of childhood it almost became my daily prayer. I wished for things to remain forever the way they were, and I did not want anything or anybody to disturb my still waters. At that age I knew exactly—or so I thought—what I wanted to make me happy. I was holding the rainbow with both hands and the core of my prayer was *Do not ever take me away, dear Lord, from our Panorama home [the place I loved]; do not ever separate me from my parents and brother [the people I passionately loved]; nor change even a little or a jot of my self-appointed, multitudinous pleasant activities [the things I loved].*

Real life, though, is full of surprises, not all of which are pleasant. Little did I think that some years later Mother and I would be

forced to look at our house from a distance, not being permitted to set foot into it, when antagonism and persecution raised their ugly faces. We then had to run from hotel to hotel for dear life's sake. It soon became evident that not only the house, but also our country had become too tight for us. And while we planned to move to a small neighboring country, suddenly negotiations started across the ocean beginning my immigration to America. "Oh Lord," I prayed again, "Please let it be anywhere but America." This big country of milk and honey scared me with its immensity. Amidst its 200 million people, I did not know one single soul. And still more difficult, I had never before been separated from my family, "Anywhere but America," I found myself repeating. But America it was. As the 13-day voyage started, I felt that part of my heart was torn out and left behind with my homeless, widowed mother.



*Anywhere but
America, I prayed.*

I completed my college education at Pacific Union College in California and then came to Andrews to work on my Master's degree at the Seminary. Was I ever scared that year! So much snow I had never seen. "Dear God," I prayed again. "You know I am willing to serve You. If you want me to work for you, please let it be anywhere but Michigan. I have left my home"—I thought I should remind God—"I have forsaken my country and family and friends. There are 50 states, Lord, please spare me from Michigan." But Michigan it was. By this time it became obvious that God's dictaphone did not work! The great school of Life still had great lessons for me to learn—and I was a slow learner.

As I look at the past three decades, I can honestly say that they are the most fruitful and rewarding years of my life. It has been a pleasure, a privilege and an honor to work here for 32 years. Andrews University has given me everything I love and ultimately galvanized my childhood prayer—I am indeed in a place I love (Michigan displays a great diversity of natural beauty), doing the work I love (outside the classroom I feel like a fish out of water), and being with the people I love (I have served under four presidents at Andrews, have had the best colleagues to work with, and the students occupy a special place in my thoughts and heart).

Finally, I want to answer a question related to retirement as it epitomizes and summarizes my philosophy the way I have adapted it: "Jesus died at 33. He took an early retirement so you and I will not be left without a job!" God bless you all.