

Thanks to all of you for coming to this memorial for our dad. Our dad passed away one month after reaching his 90th birthday. He lived a long life and was "one of a kind" as many of you would attest to. Although he would have a smile on his face and a joke at the ready most of the time his life was not an easy path. At the age of 5 his father passed away and in Greece you are considered an orphan even though his mom was still alive. Caring for my dad and his two younger sisters was a bit too much for his mom so he was sent off to live in an orphanage in Paleochora. He spent six years there and was taken out mainly because at 11 he was able to help provide for his family. Now this was not taking on a paper route but hard manual labor. While he never talked much about those days we could imagine what he felt like. Through hard work at a young age he learned the construction craft that would become his career. He would rise up and become a respected carpenter. He also explored his creative side by playing coronet in a military band. He would grow to manhood during difficult times for Greece especially. In the mid fifties he met my Mom and they decided to get married and not just continue living in Crete but take the difficult leap to travel half the globe and make their life in NYC. Without knowing the language and few contacts they left Crete the evening of their wedding which provided us with images of teary eyed guests and unknowing looks on their faces. I cannot image doing what my parents did. It takes a unique kind of strength to make that leap. They arrived in New York in 1956 which was a far cry from the sun, seas, and mountains of Crete. He started on his career and his family and in two years had two sons that he was very proud of with a third one coming a few years later. While he always said he would never have minded a daughter he was never slow to say that if you "open me up and look at my heart you see BOY written on it." He was lucky to have three which obviously led to Bonanza being his favorite show. He always worked hard and I never remember him taking a vacation. In fact, he would run his bosses construction business while his boss would go away to Greece every summer without even extra compensation. Another feat of courage was to leave his bosses business and start his own construction company. This angered his boss, my godfather actually, because he knew the kind of worker he was losing. He started JG Construction with George Zannikos and had a great run until the recession of the mid seventies. I remember how tough those times were and never remember seeing him as sad as he was then. Rather than wallow in it he began doing a number of renovation jobs to keep his family afloat. This was followed by his most successful run as a general contractor which he did until he retired. Our father was a proud man and a unique man. Proudest most in his sons and most unique in his support for anything they wanted to achieve. Not many fathers would have their sons say to them I want to be a musician or I want to be an artist and have all their fathers support without reservation. He taught us to be independent and to work hard and to also work at what we love to do. I think we have all shown to have heeded those lessons. Let us now raise our glasses and remember a one-of-a-kind. John Vavagiakis.