

The two sisters behind the Circle Dance

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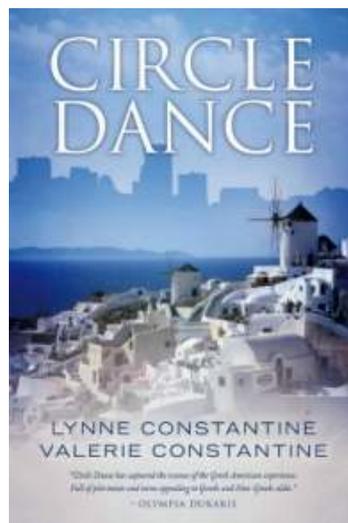
Lynne and Valerie Constantine

Write what you know. This is the most common piece of advice given to aspiring novelists. Lynne Constantine and her sister Valerie took this comforting principle to heart, drawing from their own experience growing up in a Greek American family.

More than 10 years in the making, Lynne (she left the corporate world in 2000 to pursue a writing career) and Valerie (an English literature major who worked as the development director for a non-profit organization) are the authors of Circle Dance - a novel they describe as a labor of love.

Set in Baltimore and the tiny Greek island of Ikaria, Circle Dance offers a view into the life of a dynamic family that has successfully achieved the American dream without abandoning the customs and traditions handed down through their Greek heritage. The plots bring generations together in a dance of rejoicing and mourning, loss and healing.

Olympia Dukakis, the Academy Award-winning Greek American actress, who reviewed the book, said: "Circle Dance has captured the essence of the Greek American experience. Full of plot twists and turns appealing to Greeks and non-Greeks alike".



"Circle Dance is a segment of the Greek American population rarely seen in media - much different from My Big Fat Greek Wedding and other depictions of Greek families," explains Lynne Constantine. "Our

story is told from the perspective of second generation sisters who are trying to hold on to the Greek traditions handed down to them while at the same they are assimilating into American culture. This is a beautiful family saga spanning three generations.”

The plot

Young, smart and beautiful with everything figured out – or so they thought. Born into a prosperous Greek American family, sisters Nicole and Theodora have achieved the perfect balance between the old world rich in Greek tradition and the freedom of life in America.

Headstrong and independent, Nicole plunges into life head first, too often ignoring the risks. Her talent and astute business acumen make her the perfect heir to her father’s empire, but his old world attitudes prevent him from giving the top spot to a woman. Nicole’s world spins out of control when she falls for a married senator who shares her heritage and her dreams. While struggling to navigate previously uncharted moral waters, she uncovers treachery and corruption that will break both her sister’s and her father’s hearts. The decisions she makes will affect the happiness of those closest to her and will define the woman she is to become.

As for the young and conventional Theodora, she learns that marriage is not the paradise she envisioned. She must soon confront the growing suspicion that her new husband is not the man he seems. Forced to endure the constant disdain and disapproval of her patrician mother-in-law, she resigns herself to the fact that she will always be considered an outsider. As she struggles to succeed at her marriage, she seeks the wisdom and counsel of her beloved Greek grandmother who has been happily married for over half a century. Ultimately she must come to terms with the reality of her own life and take responsibility for the role she has played in deceiving herself.

A labor of love

“It was really a labor of love for us based on our desire to keep our Greek heritage alive,” says Lynne. “We’re second generation Greeks. Our parents were born here, but we grew up with grandparents from Greece. I really wanted to leave a legacy for my children. That was one idea for the book.”

Another major source of inspiration for the book was the sisters’ love of reading about different ethnicities. “But there were really not that many books about Greek American families out there,” says Lynne.

Asked to describe the book, she says it’s a story about a Greek American family that is fully assimilated, but that holds firmly to traditions and the heritage they were raised in. Ikaria, where the story begins, is where their mother’s family is from.

“It is fiction,” she says. “It is told through the eyes of two sisters who are in their 20s and they are going through major changes in their life.”

Circle Dance, which was recently revised by Lynne and Valerie who are now self-publishing it, was recently ranked in the top 100 of Amazon’s top rated women’s fiction books. The feedback has been more than encouraging - not bad for their first foray into fiction writing.

“We really didn’t know what we were doing when we started writing,” says Lynne. “We even went out and bought a book about how to write your first book.”

As for the feedback they have been receiving since September when the revised version of the book was launched, Lynne says it has been overwhelmingly positive. She says the Greek Americans appreciate it and many say it’s the perfect book to pass on to their children, their daughters in particular, so they can gain an understanding about what it was like growing up Greek in America.

“But it is not so Greek that no one else can’t relate to it,” adds Lynne, who is now working on her second book - a thriller. Valerie is also working on her own book - a historical fiction. In the future, they hope to find a producer who will turn Circle Dance into a film.