With this Hope

“Follow me if I advance, Kill me if I retreat, Avenge me if I die.” Those simple words hold strength and emotion that I feel could describe a great man, my great grandfather. When the Turkish invaded Greece, they came in with full fury to destroy us and everything we were. They started off in Constantinople and made their way to many other parts of Greece. One little town called Kandila was their next victim. They entered the town, and as they cleared their path they destroyed homes and killed innocent men, women and children. My great grandfather, Kosta Kousoulas, was the mayor of Kandila. He was a man of power and people looked to him when they needed something. So now, with his village in need, what was he to do? He spread the word for many to go towards the monastery. There, they would be safe until the army of Greece would come.

People walked or used donkeys to travel up the mountain. The small path only went a short way. After a while, they had to climb the wall of the mountain. The nuns assisted. My grandfather was still in town with others. The Turkish wreaked havoc upon the town. They searched for all the young girls, so they could take them back to Turkey to sell and rape them. My great grandfather was not going to let this happen. He gathered four hundred and fifty girls and hid them in this room where he made cheese for the town. It was a few feet under his house where no one could find them.

When night fell, the Turkish climbed the walls of the mountain to take over the monastery. There was this heavy metal door that they had to get through. They paid a Greek man to open it for them. Once they got inside the monastery, they destroyed icons that famous monks had made and many things that could never be replaced. The monastery was destroyed. They took women and children and cut off their heads and tossed them off the mountain down to a field. My great grandfather could see the hell that was happening above. The screams of his people called out to him. He knew that he had to do something; he couldn’t just leave them
behind to die. He gathered 950 men, and they went up to mountain and they began to attack the Turkish. He gave them a fight they would never forget. Many died from both sides. The Turkish lost the fight against my great grandfather and his men, so they left the town. The town was not burned down like they planned.

Later on, the Greek Army came, but was too late to fight for Kandila. Kandila and their mayor had saved themselves. My great grandfather died fighting to save his town, and in the end he was their savior. They could never find all of his body to hold him a proper funeral, but his spirit lived on from the statue they built to remember him and his fight for justice. The army later found the underground cheese room that my great grandfather had. Waiting there, four hundred girls sat patiently- still alive (Journal and Interview).

My great grandfather was a simple man that could have retreated to save himself, but he knew that in this dark time his people needed him. I myself would call him a hero. He saved so many lives. He is the thought in my head when I see someone hurt anyone or even themselves.

I never saved lives from an army of Turks, but I have saved the life of one person. When everyone gave up on an emotionally disturbed girl and she had nowhere to go, I stepped in and told her that I was there for her. I gave her the hope to see a new day and life. In the moment, I did not think I could change much or her, but I did know that I wanted her to smile, even if it was for a moment.

Who am I? I was no one to her. I was just another girl in her class. I had watched her cry and wipe tears from her face just to hide it from peers. She was lost in herself and could not find her way back. Her cut up wrists and arms told me the beginning of her story. I walked up to her in after class and told her that even though it feels like she has lost everyone, she still has me. She did not say a thing to me for a while. I did not blame her for being afraid, but I was not giving up on her. I messaged her over Facebook and told her that we could talk whenever she wanted. I told her I could see her in the morning or after school. I was not going to give up on her. She never responded to my messages.

Again we were in class; she had not been there for two days. When I finally saw her face, I could see the tears in her eyes and the circles around them. She was breaking down. She got up and left class. After fifteen minutes or so when she did not come back, I asked my teacher if I
could go the washroom. As soon as I left the class, I started to look for her. I finally found her sitting in the hallway by a locker. Her head was down. I said nothing as I sat next to her. She did not look up, but I could tell she was crying. I put my hand over hers and told her that I would help her.

We sat in silence until the bell rang. I looked at her and thought she would move, but she did not. Once the halls cleared she got up. She started to walk away but I called out to her. She asked me why I wanted to help so much. I said that no one should feel that much pain. She started to cry again. I hugged her and we slowly began to walk. We came to the guidance office; I made the appointment for her to speak to someone who could help. I went to leave as soon as she sat in the room with social worker, but she said “no!” She wanted me to stay.

She spoke about the abuse she suffered at home and the reason behind her cuts. She said that I saved her-I saved her life. I was confused. I could not understand what I had done to save her. I was only being a friend.

The masked attacker was herself. The constant abuse from home, and the feeling of being alone had led her to cutting herself, as well to the letter she planned to leave behind. She said that she was going to kill herself. She said that my messages to her stopped her. She said that me saying that I was there for her was what saved her.

In the end, the social worker got her out of her situation at home. The social worker made time to see her. She said no at first but then agreed on one thing, that I would be a part of the sessions.

That year consisted of long talks, depression, and friendship. She came to me on her last day of school and told me those words that still surprised me. She said, “You saved my life. Your words were there for me when no one was ever around.” She asked me how she could repay me. I smiled and said that she already did. “Your smile and happiness is my gift.”

I may have not saved many people in a courageous fashion like my great grandfather, but I did save one. I saved my friend’s life. With words one can make a difference. I found that I can save and stand up for anyone who is harmed; with this hope anything can happen.
Works Cited

Interview of Georgia, granddaughter of Kosta Kousoulas. February 1, 2012.