

Litsa (Chariklia) Alexandraki (1918-1984)

Anna Amera

Litsa Alexandraki was born in Russia of Greek parents in 1918. Her parents were long established well-to-do Greeks who had to flee Russia due to the political circumstances of the time and come to Greece as refugees. She was educated in Greece and in June 1940 she graduated from the Faculty of Law of Athens University and was assigned as lawyer by the High Court of Greece (Areos Pagos) to the First Instance Court of Athens in August 1941. During the Second World War, Litsa Alexandraki who had also graduated from the School of Voluntary Nurses of the Greek Red Cross, offered her services to the nation and was appointed to high and responsible posts by the Swiss, Greek and International Red Cross.



From 1946 to 1950 she studied criminology, sociology, psychology, social work and education at the London School of Economics and at the University of London. Upon her return to Greece she was appointed as Advisor to the Greek Ministry of Welfare and she was responsible for the initiation of a program which aimed at assisting families whose head had been killed, either in the war or the civil war that followed, or were devastated by other circumstances. During that period she participated in a number of law-drafting committees, assisted in the organization of the schools of social work and taught social work. During that period also she worked very closely with Dr. Spiros Doxiadis, a pediatrician and later professor of pediatrics and Minister of Welfare. The two of them, influenced by research findings that indicated that institutionalization was detrimental to the development of babies and very young children, initiated and brought to completion an up to date Center for Babies called "Metera", which received and cared for babies whose mostly unwed mothers were not able to care for them, wanted to give them for adoption or entrusted them to the Center while they were securing a viable situation for themselves and their child. It was the first time in Greece that this protection was offered in small, family like units and not in an impersonal, institutional manner. The Center came to be in 1953, it started functioning in 1955, a school of Baby Carers was initiated in 1957 and a section offering hospitality to the mothers was initiated in 1958. Again it was the first time that protection for unwed mothers was offered in Greece. Litsa Alexandraki remained on the Board of "Metera" till the middle 60s when the dictatorship deposed her. In 1966 she participated in the group that researched and formulated the law concerning adoptions in Greece.

From 1960 to 1974, Litsa Alexandraki , worked as Deputy Head of the Greek section of ICEM (International Committee on European Migration) which had its headquarters in Geneva. She was the Head of that organization from 1974 to 1980.

Litsa Alexandraki was a woman of strong convictions. She believed strongly and devoted her efforts to the protection of children, to the protection of refugees and migrants, to volunteering and to social work.

As a volunteer she offered her services to the Red Cross not only during the war but also later on in her life. In 1953 she went to the Ionian Islands, devastated by a very strong earth-quake, to care for victims. For many years she was a volunteer for the Queen's Fund and consultant to the Queen on matters of child welfare, when Greece was a Kingdom. She was also a founding member of the Volunteers League and remained a member of that organization to the end of her life.

Litsa Alexandraki was a founding member of the Hellenic Associations of Social Workers and was its President from 1961 to 1963. In 1962 she was elected President of the International Federation of Social Workers and served in this position from 1962 to 1968, as she was elected three times as president. During this time she expanded the IFSW membership to Asia, Africa and Latin America. When she resigned as IFSW President in 1968 she became Honorary President until her death in 1984. In Litsa Alexandraki's name an international award for outstanding social work was introduced by IFSW in 1988.

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