

SONG OF MY LIFE

A Memoir

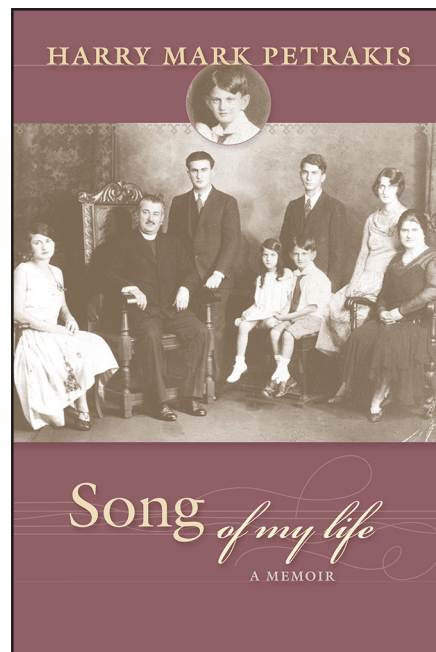
Harry Mark Petrakis

With the discipline of a surgeon performing a critical operation, acclaimed storyteller Harry Mark Petrakis strips away layers of his nine decades of life to expose the blood and bone of a human being in his third memoir and twenty-fifth book, *Song of My Life*. Petrakis is unsparing in exposing his own flaws, from a youthful gambling addiction, to the enormous lie of his military draft, to a midlife suicidal depression. Yet he is compassionate in depicting the foibles of others around him. Petrakis writes with love about his parents and five siblings, with nostalgia as he describes the Greek neighborhoods and cramped Chicago apartments of his childhood, and with deep affection for his wife and sons as he recalls with candor, comedy, and charity a writer's long, fully-lived life.

Petrakis recounts a near-fatal childhood illness, which confined him to bed for two years and, through hours of reading during the day and night, nurtured his imagination and compulsion toward storytelling. A high school dropout, Petrakis also recalls his work journey in the steel mills, railroad depots, and shabby diners of the city. There is farce and comedy in the pages as he describes the intricate framework of lies that drove his courtship of Diana, who has been his wife of sixty-nine loving years. Petrakis shares his struggles for over a decade to write and publish and, finally, poignantly describes the matchless instant when he holds his first published book in his hands. The chapters on his experiences in Hollywood, where he had gone to write the screenplay of his best-selling novel *A Dream of Kings* are as revealing of the machinations and egos of moviemaking as any Oliver Stone documentary.

Petrakis's individual story, as fraught with drama and revelation as the adventures of Odysseus, comes to an elegiac conclusion when, at the age of ninety, he ruminates on his life and its approaching end. With a profound and searing honesty, this self-exploration of a solitary writer's life helps us understand our own existences and the tapestry of lives connecting us together in our shared human journey.

July 2014, 216 pages, 10 b&w illus.



Harry Mark Petrakis published his first story, "Pericles on 31st Street," in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1957. Since then he has written twenty-five books of fiction, essays, and memoirs, and he has twice been nominated for the National Book Award in fiction. Petrakis has been honored with the O. Henry Award, the Chicago Public Library's Carl Sandburg Award, and awards from the Friends of American Writers, Friends of Literature, and the Society of Midland Authors. Petrakis has adapted his stories and novels for film and television and has lectured on storytelling before colleges and clubs across the United States.

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