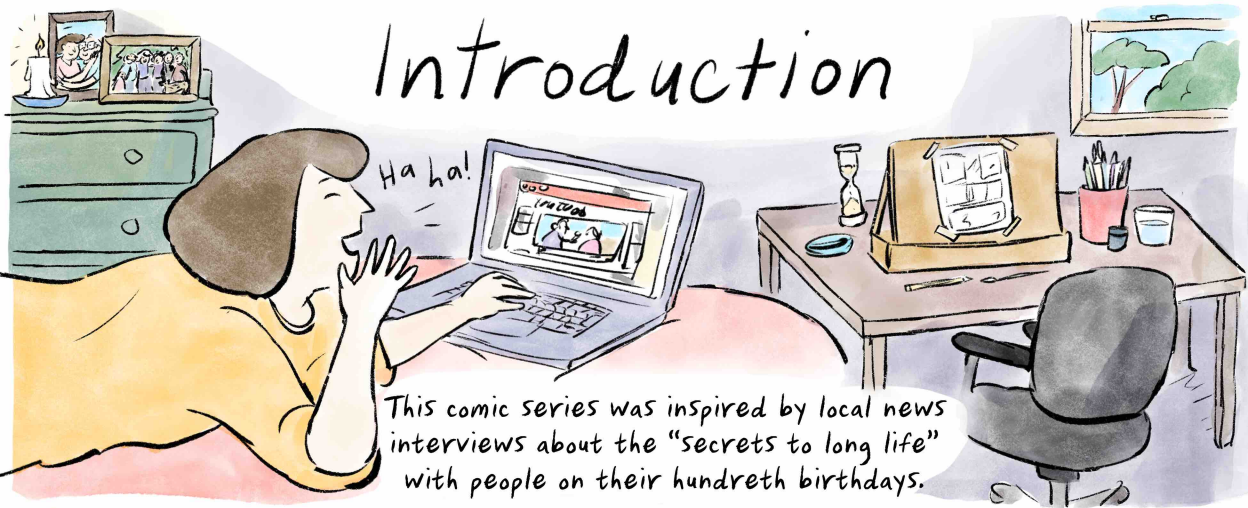


Introduction



I loved watching these videos. They were often both funny and profound.

What's your secret to long life?

I eat porridge every day and stay away from men.



At that age, people seem to lose their hangups.

I found it incredibly compelling that these were people who grew up in a time before electricity, just after women got the vote and through major wars and political turmoil.



I wanted to document first-hand memories of these events before it was too late.

The answers were sometimes hilarious.

I feel better when I get a good dickin'.

Grandma!



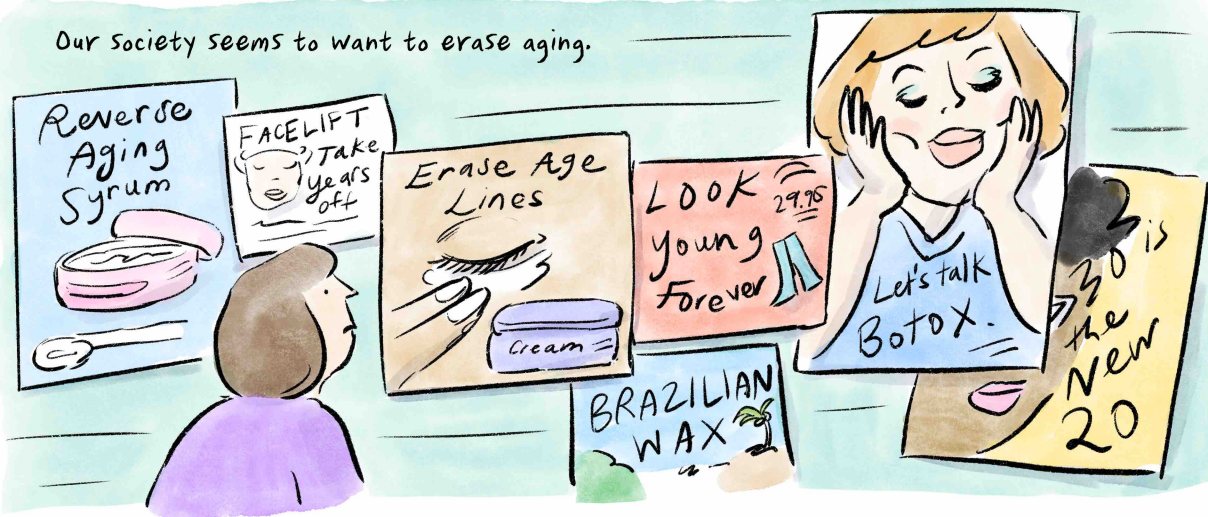
100 year-old talks about getting dick

As a cartoonist, I liked the idea of braiding the past and present in words and images...

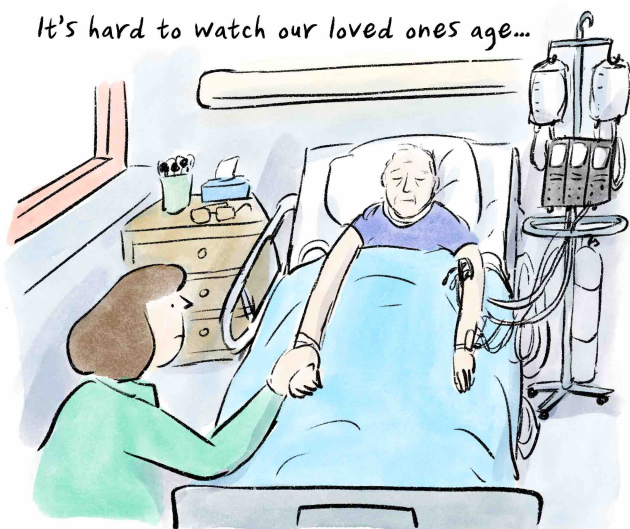


...finding the poetry of the themes that surfaced.

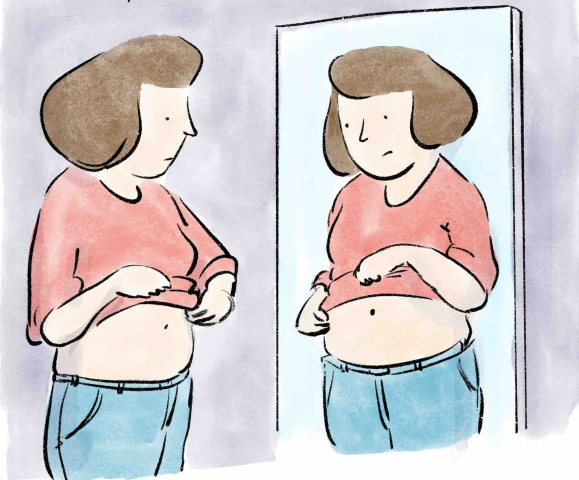
Our society seems to want to erase aging.



It's hard to watch our loved ones age...



...and experience our own bodies in decline.



I wanted this project to take a direct look at aging, to better understand it, prepare for it and learn to do it well.



It feels important to make the best of the precious years we have in this lifetime.

I started doing interviews in 2017, the first with Lawrence, a 98-year-old man at my Bubby's eldercare residence.



Sadly, my Bubby has alzheimers and at only 85, was too young to participate.



It was hard to find people well enough to interview at 100, so I had to lower the age limit. I interviewed people at 87 to 107.

I had long-wanted to go to an artists' residency in Angoulême, France, where comics are a celebrated artform.



I was lucky enough to receive grant funding to support the project.



I spent almost a year at the residency, making comics in my shared studio between travelling for interviews.



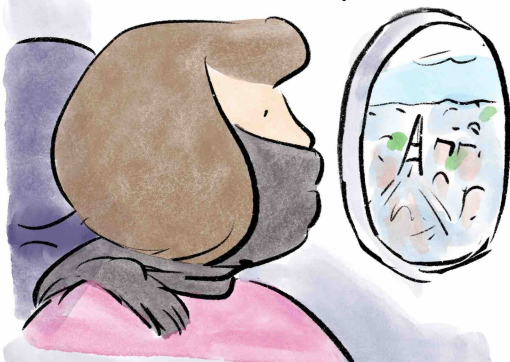
From there, I promoted my search for interviews, followed leads, arranged interviews, coordinated travel and hired translators when necessary.

I travelled to 11 countries across Europe, including the Blue Zones of Sardinia, Italy and Ikaria, Greece, known for their high rates of centenarians.



When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, I had to evacuate from France back to Canada and into quarantine.

Covid spread through elder care homes like wildfire, killing the elderly en masse and exposing terrible conditions in these facilities.

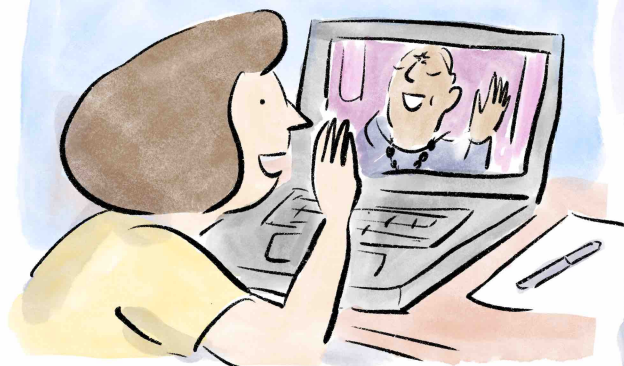


I had been planning a trip to Okinawa, Japan, another Blue Zone, but it was now impossible.



Suddenly, it was dangerous to visit the elderly, and they were more isolated than ever.

I pivoted my approach and started doing interviews over the internet or phone. In all, I did almost 40 interviews.



It used to take a certain amount of convincing to get an interview, but people were more willing to connect than ever.

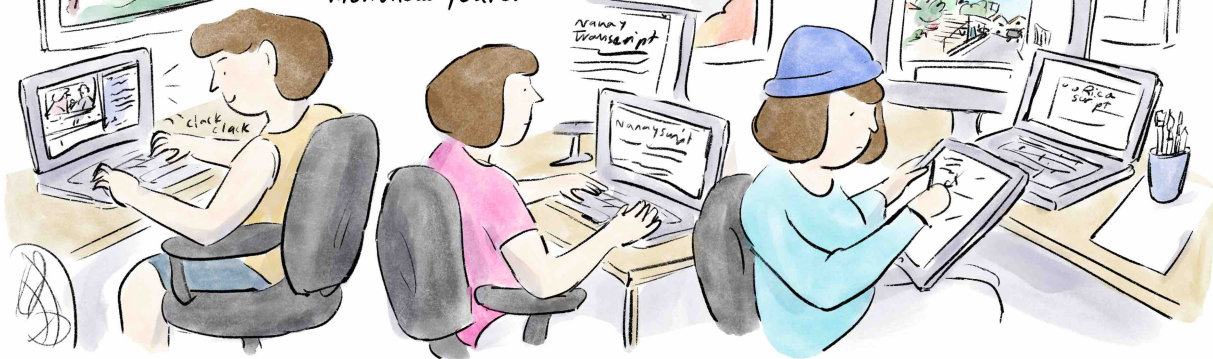
The project felt even more important than when I started.



Sadly, not every interview made it into the book, but I am grateful to each person and family who shared their stories with me.

Over the past many years, I have been turning these interviews into comics.
Transcribing, researching, scripting, thumbailing, inking, colouring...

Each process taking
months... years.



So many images
to draw...



It feels like this project has
taken 100 years to finish!

Finally, I can say with confidence that I have
discovered the secret to long life...





I hope it helps.

One Hundred Year - Old Wisdom with Irinie "Rica" Pedos in Ikaria, Greece

My mom and I
meet our
translator,
Valentini, at
the ferry docks
in Athens.



Without any interviews lined up, we are
hoping to meet people organically.



We dock in Evdilos, and find out about a real
estate agent who gives tours of local centenarians.

I don't see
anyone.

She's not
answering.

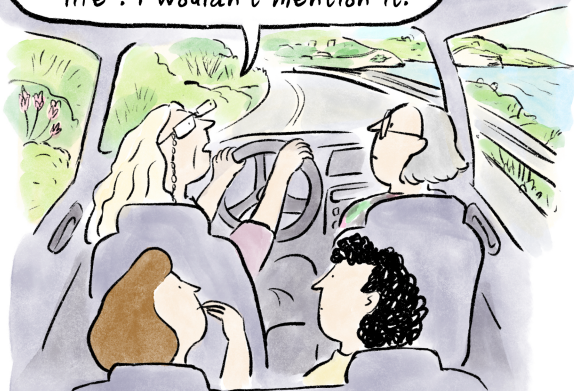


It seems longevity is
an industry here too.

Our Airbnb host comes to take
us to her place in the nearby
village of Kampos.



People are tired of being asked
about "the secrets to long
life". I wouldn't mention it.



We decide to focus the questions on the
history of the island rather than longevity.

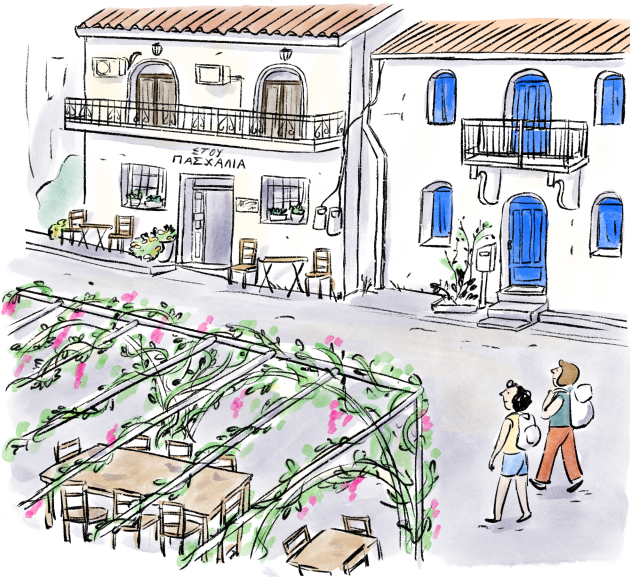
Once we get settled, Valentini and I walk up
the road. We stop to chat with a mechanic.

I have a 96 year-old uncle
but I think he's under the
weather right now...

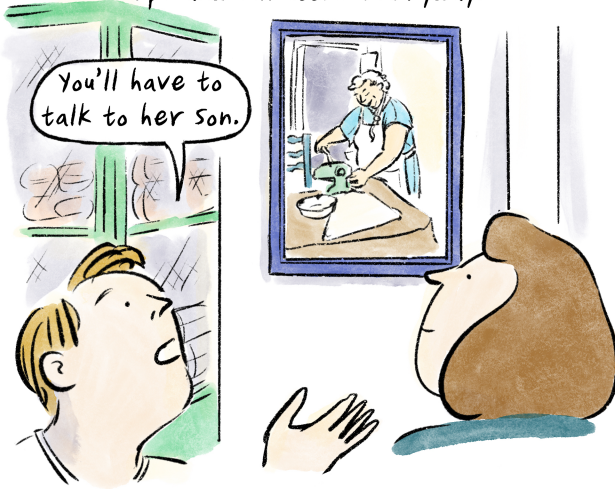


I wonder if he's
trying to protect
his uncle from us.

We arrive at the Kaffenia in Kampos.



Inside, and American tells us that the woman who runs this place is 90, has had two broken hips and still cooks everyday.



You'll have to talk to her son.

Her son, Zacharias, shows up soon after, suspicious of our intentions.



What's with reporters coming here searching for the secret to long life?

You ask invasive questions and diminish people's lives to a sound byte!



This is different... I'm trying to make a visual archive of her life. I want to honour her!



At this point I'm not sure if I'm trying to convince him or myself.

Is there is anything we can do for you in exchange for am interview with your mom?

You can come help build a cob house tomorrow.

We'll be there.



Zacharias brings me to the kitchen to meet Irinie, who everyone affectionately calls 'Rica'.

She is eating stuffed zucchini after cooking all morning.



She doesn't speak English but asks Zacharias if I'm hungry and offers me apricots.

Rica wakes up every day at 7, cooks all morning then sleeps in the afternoon.

She often watches cooking shows on TV to wind down.



After a nap, she gets up in the evening to hang out with her friends until late.

People used come to Rica at the Kaffenia for insulin shots. Now Zacharias does it.



"People also come here to pick up their social security checks."

"It's May, so there aren't many tourists. It will just be locals tonight."



In the summer months her other kids come back from all over Greece and help out for the high season.

Zacharias takes me upstairs to Rica's apartment.



There's a walker for her on either end of the staircase. It's a great system.

Zacharias shows me a box of letters from the 1830s.

Are these your mom's?

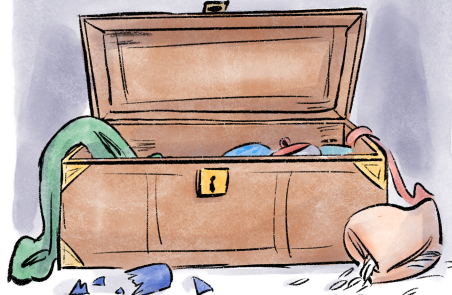
She's 90, not 190!

I continue to embarrass myself.

Rica's father was a merchant, and had a shop and a fishing boat.



"This chest had been in his store."



"When the Germans came, they took everything."

These are letters from Communist exiles of the Greek Civil War.



From 1946-1949, anyone identified as a Communist was sent to remote islands.

50 Communist exiles were sent to Kampos and used a shed outside the Kaffenia as a kitchen.



One man came back to visit years later. Opening a hole in the wall, he pulled out a pile of letters no one else had known about.



Rica had a romance with the son of a Communist exile. They exchanged letters for years.



He came to visit her a few years ago. They both cried.

Many of the exiles were academics and professionals.



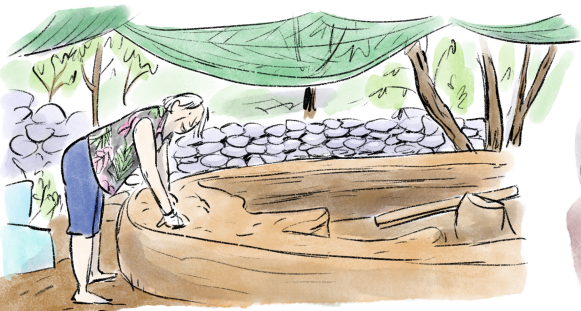
"They left a big imprint on the Icarians."

Rica learned a lot about nursing, which was very helpful especially for treating and birthing livestock.



"That's how I learned to give shots."

The next day, my mom and I have so much fun helping build the cob house, it doesn't seem like a fair trade.



This land belonged to Zacharias' dad. Zacharias recently bought a neighbouring plot to expand it.



He has goats, dogs, geese and chickens and quizzes us on all the trees and bushes.

That night, we are invited to interview Rica while she trims onions for the Wednesday night green onion pie.



My mom helps while I ask questions. Zacharias runs in and out as he prepares the night's meal.



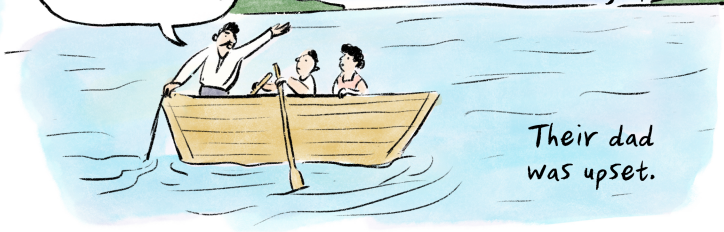
Rica was born in 1930 in a village called Fles near the port in Evdilos.



She tells us a story from when she was young and out fishing with her father and a brother.

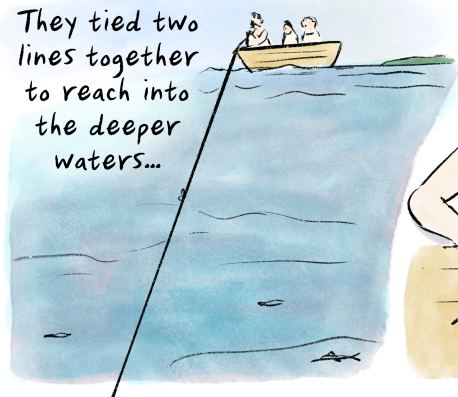
You let us drift too far!

The wind had taken them far from their usual fishing spot.



Their dad was upset.

They tied two lines together to reach into the deeper waters...



"He wasn't angry after that!"

My life began when I started high school in Agios Kynos.



It was a few hours walk to school.



Date trees were planted for travellers to snack on all along the footpaths connecting the villages.

There weren't roads until 30 years ago!



A cousin chimes in from the background.



Rica was good at languages and studied Ancient Greek.

After one year, her parents were too worried about her and brought her back home.



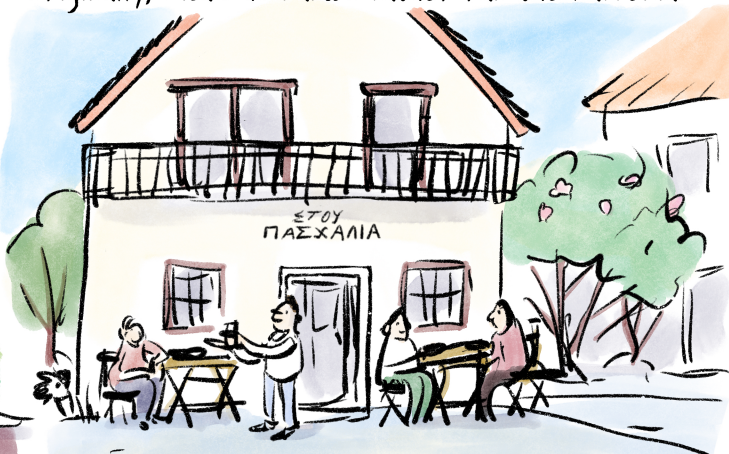
Rica married her husband when she was 26.

"I was old."



He was the brother of a friend of hers.

Originally, Rica's husband's father ran the kaffenia.



Then his brother ran it for a while.

Rica and her husband came to help and eventually took it over.



At some point, an extension was built.

"We did everything together."



They shared all the duties of the kaffenia, cooking cleaning, staying late to close up.

They had six children.



Zacharias was the youngest.

"On the day Zacharias was born, I did all the chores of the day, cooking and cleaning."



"I even made the bed that I would give birth on!"

"When I was ready, I called the midwife."



"I gave birth on the first pain."



"When I went downstairs with the baby, I saw a pack of cigarettes on the table."

The local taxi drivers were using it to bet on when I'd give birth!



It's getting to be dinner-time and people start to fill up the kaffenia.



A bunch of Rica's friends show up. We all sit together.



They have many more birth stories. "At one point, the midwife was also the baker."



Keep breathing, I have to get these loaves in the oven...

"She was good at multitasking."

One woman gave birth on the same day as her cow and had to go to the field to check on them. The baby had rolled away from the mother.



"If she hadn't, the calf would have been rejected by the mother."

Finally, I feel I can ask Rica about her ideas about longevity.

I don't think there is any secret. All I know is I always had way more work than I wanted to.



The kaffenia is bustling. It really is the centre of Kampos.



Soon the conversation turns back to food, a subject that seems to come up a lot around Rica.



And at the centre of the centre is Rica.

