



THE TRUTH ABOUT FATHER CHRISTMAS ST NICHOLAS & KASTELLORIZO

by Dr George Stabelos, Melbourne

This Christmas, when you tell your children or grandchildren about Father Christmas, how about telling them something that might be closer to the historical truth? In reading about the real story behind the man who would contribute world-wide to making gift-giving at Christmas popular, we should also tell them that this man was born in the Eastern Mediterranean, was Greek and may have had a connection to the island of Kastellorizo and its people.

The Man Behind the Story of the original Father Christmas/Santa Claus is stated to have been Saint Nicholas¹. He has been described as a Christian Greek Orthodox Bishop and gift-giver, who was born in Patara, on the Asia Minor coast, 30km or so, north-west of Kastellorizo. For most of his life in the fourth century AD, he lived in Myra, Lycia, (now Demre, Turkey) 40km east of Kastellorizo². St Nicholas made his life and legend there as a kind man who had a reputation for helping the poor, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships; thereafter becoming exceptionally popular throughout the western world. This continued through the centuries and became the traditional basis for the adapted British figure of Father Christmas and the adapted Dutch figure of Sinterklaas or Santa Klaus. He was from the Mediterranean, near Kastellorizo and not the "north pole"!

St Nicholas, Myra and Kastellorizo

According to Wikipedia, "Demre (Myra) is a town and its surrounding district in the Antalya Province on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. A substantial Christian community of Greeks lived in Myra until the 1920s when they migrated to Greece as part of the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey. The abandoned Greek villages in the region are a striking reminder of this exodus. Abandoned Greek houses can still be seen at Demre and the regions of Kalkan, Kaş (opposite Kastellorizo) and Livisi which was a Greek ghost town. A small population of Turkish farmers moved into the region when the Greeks migrated to Greece in the 1920s. The region is popular with tourists today, particularly Christian pilgrims, who visit the tomb of Saint Nicholas³."

A very telling account of the background and relationship of Myra to Kastellorizo, is given in an interview in 1970 by the late Kastellorizian, Vlassios Antonas. In an extract entitled "Reminiscences of Antifilo (Kas) and Myra", from The Centre for Asia Minor Studies, Athens, Greece, reported on by the US based website, "St Nicholas Centre- Discovering the truth about Santa Claus", Antonas is quoted as saying³:

WISHING YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A SAFE NEW YEAR FROM FRIENDS OF KASTELLORIZO



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"There were 400 Christians living in Myra (in the late 1800s and early 1900s). There were no Turks. The main activities were in trade and agriculture .

Everyone in Myra originated from Kastellorizo. They had come to Myra to find better opportunities. The language spoken was identical to the Kastellorizian (Greek) idiom.

Myra was about 1 hour's walk from the sea. It lies on a fertile plain. Before arriving in Myra from the coast, one crosses this beautiful plain irrigated by three rivers—the Tsai, or Myros, the Anthami, and the Limnionas or Vromolimnionas.

Outside the town, there were no roads, only this broad plain. There were no mahaladhes (surrounding villages). We knew exactly where everyone lived. All the roads radiated out from the central crossroads in the middle of the town. These 2 main roads had been built by the Russians in my grandfather's time, in about 1830. There was only 1 square—Plateia ton Myron—which had shops, 3 cafes and a market.

There were 2 churches in Myra—Ayios Nikolaos, where the saint's tomb is to be found, and Ayios Sion, which was a subterranean chapel. Ayios Nikolaos is located 1 kilometre from the centre of the town. It was built by Theodosius II. The town's cemetery was located here.

There was also a small primary school (in Myra) that catered for about 30 students up to year 4. After 4th class, we completed our studies on Kastellorizo.

*I worked with the abbot of the monastery which was attached to Ayios Nikolaos. I remember Kyrillos Romanos, who was the last abbot. I left Myra in 1914 to avoid conscription in the(First World) War."*³

Whilst this suggests that Myra was especially populated by those of Kastellorizian heritage in the 19th century, it is unclear if the Greeks living in Myra at the time and life of St Nicholas in the early fourth century AD had a Kastellorizian connection. Some suggest that most Greeks living on the Lycian coast originated from Crete and this theory has also been applied to the original Greek inhabitants of Kastellorizo. It is also noteworthy, that to the author's knowledge, Kastellorizo is the only Greek island to have a Lycian tomb (c.400BC) and this is testament to the likely to-and-fro movement of inhabitants from the Lycian Coast opposite Kastellorizo.

Legends of St Nicholas

Many Greek families have a member or friend called Nicholas. This is in the main, due to the life and legend of St Nicholas and his consequent popularisation . A favourite story, first told by the eighth-century monk Michael the Archimandrite, concerned a once-wealthy man, in Myra, who lost his fortune and decided to sell his three daughters into prostitution because he couldn't provide dowries. Legend has it that "Nicholas, whose own parents had left him a large inheritance, sneaked up to the man's house in the dead of night and threw three bags of gold through the window, enabling the girls to find respectable husbands." ¹

Another story tells of Nicholas helping some sailors that were caught in a dreadful storm off the coast of current day Turkey. The storm was apparently raging all around them and all the men were terrified that their ship would sink beneath the giant waves ³⁻⁴. This was not an experience foreign to Mediterranean seafarers who were well-versed in the perils of ancient sea travel at that time. The men then prayed to St Nicholas to help them. Suddenly, as legend has it, he was standing on the deck before them. It is said "he ordered the sea to be calm, the storm died away, and they were able to sail their ship safely to port"⁴.

In Greece today, St. Nicholas is considered the protector of sailors. He is the patron saint of the Hellenic and Merchant Navy and his saint's day (6th December) is marked by festivities aboard all ships and boats, at sea and in port, in order to bless the waters and give them safe voyages throughout the year .

Legends of St Nicholas Vs Historical "Facts"

"In The Saint Who Would Be Santa Claus, Adam English, a professor of religion at Campbell University in North Carolina, is in search of the man himself. He notes that the real St. Nicholas is obscured not only by the trappings of Santa Claus, but by layers of medieval folklore. Unlike other church fathers, he left no writings, and the first mention of him dates from only the sixth century" ¹.

Professor English writes that Nicholas becomes, "a mysterious night visitor who silently enters the home to bestow wonderful gifts to children" and that "Nicholas gives from his own pocket, secretly, and with a purpose of encouraging moral behaviour " ¹.

"Professor English nonetheless, builds a convincing case that there really was a St. Nicholas, around the middle of the fourth century. He points out, the name 'Nicholas' (a combination of the Greek words for 'victory' and 'people'), hitherto virtually unknown in public records and ledgers and on tombstone inscriptions, suddenly became popular in Asia Minor and



THE REAL FACE OF SANTA. EXTREME LEFT, AND ELSEWHERE: ARTISTS' IMPRESSION OF ST NICHOLAS AND AS SEEN ON ICONOGRAPHY. TOP MIDDLE AND SECOND FROM THE RIGHT; A FORENSIC AND DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION OF WHAT ST NICHOLAS MAY HAVE REALLY LOOKED LIKE AS RECONSTRUCTED BY FACIAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER, ENGLAND AND DIGITAL ARTISTS. IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.STNICHOLASCENTER.ORG/PAGES/REAL-FACE/](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/real-face/)

elsewhere. A still-extant tomb at Myra (modern Demre), dates archaeologically to the right period. When the Seljuk Turks, who were Muslims, swept through western Asia Minor in 1087, Italian sailors transported the bones that were in the tomb to Bari, on the heel of Italy, where they are venerated to this day. Imaging tests conducted in 2004 revealed that they belonged to an elderly man who had suffered a broken jaw, perhaps during persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire during the early fourth century.

Professor English uses data from the ancient world to argue that at least some of the legends that grew up around St. Nicholas might have been based on fact. He suggests that the story of the sisters saved from prostitution plausibly reflects fourth-century social realities." ¹.

Globalisation of St Nicholas: Emergence of Father Christmas & Santa Claus

In 1066, before he set sail to England, William the Conqueror prayed to St. Nicholas asking that his conquest would go well. In the UK, particularly in England, he became 'Father Christmas'. In France, he was then known as 'Père Noël'. ⁴⁻⁶

Dutch and German immigrants brought St. Nicholas to America in the early 19th century, and he underwent a process of assimilation, trading in his bishop's miter and crosier for a fur-trimmed red suit and cap. In the early USA his name was 'Kris Kringle' (from the Christkind). Later, Dutch settlers in the USA took the old stories of St. Nicholas with them and Kris Kringle and St. Nicholas became 'Sinterklaas' or as we now say, 'Santa Claus'! ⁴⁻⁶

The red and white Santa we now know was the creation of poet Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863), the author of "The Night Before Christmas"; cartoonist Thomas Nast; illustrators like N.C. Wyeth and Norman Rockwell; and the magazine ads for Coca-Cola painted by Haddon Simmons starting in 1931, in which Santa took a break from the arduousness of setting up junior's electric train by pausing to have a coke. ⁴⁻⁸ The UK Father Christmas and the American Santa Claus became more and more alike over the years and are now one and the same.

What did the face of St Nicholas really look like?

One of the most compelling views we may have of the real St. Nicholas was created not by ancient artists, nor seen in orthodox churches or icons, but by utilising modern forensic facial reconstruction. When the crypt at the Basilica San Nicola in Bari was repaired in the 1950s, the saint's skull and bones were documented with x-ray photos and detailed measurements. Caroline

Wilkinson, a facial anthropologist at the University of Manchester (England), used these data and modern software simulations to create modern reconstruction of the long-dead man as seen in the above images ⁷.

St Nicholas: man with a moral compass

Despite his generosity and consideration for others, St. Nicholas was exiled from Myra and later put in prison during the persecution against Christians by Roman Emperor Diocletian.

"In the end, the "true" St. Nicholas is unknowable, perhaps half legend and half truth. Whether historical, fantastical or a combination of both, he meant so much to those who revered him for so many centuries, that he became forever associated with the gift of love and giving that is Christmas " ¹.

This Christmas is a good time to consider that the tiny Greek island of Kastellorizo, or at least its Mediterranean surrounds, as part of the Greek Byzantine and Roman empires, are likely to have played a role in how the world perceives and celebrates Christmas today. At Christmas, think also of our Kastellorizian forebears and what our Hellenic heritage, values and figures like St Nicholas have contributed substantially to the modern western world we live in and consider just why we buy presents every December.

Author's note. This article is dedicated to my mother Rose (Triantafylla) Stabelos (nee Atherinos-Peronis-Papanastasiou), who taught me about all things Kastellorizian, my late uncle Nicholas Patiniotis, those named Nik, Nick, Nic or Nicholas and all others like the saint himself, who show kindness, help, protect and dedicate themselves to a worthy cause, including the preservation of the history and culture of Kastellorizo.

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Thanks also to Nicholas Pappas for reviewing the article.

STUDENT EXCHANGE

By Ella Venoutsos, Mia Gelavis and Kirralee Pitsikas

Kirralee Pitsikas

I was honoured to have been selected and then participate in the Friends of Kastellorizo Student Exchange program for 2019. This journey has become a part of me and who I am and will stay with me forever. My connection to the Kastellorizian Greek community goes back many generations. My yiayia and pappou (Nina and Jack Pitsikas) both originate from 'Kazzie' families. I grew up knowing not only that I was of Greek descent, but also a "Kazzie."

I was so excited when I found out I was chosen and now that I am back it was all I had hoped it would be and more.

I had never been to Greece let alone away from my family for more than a few days before. When we landed in Athens, surrounded by many Greek speaking people, posters and shops all with a Greek focus (every café was selling my favourite food- spanakopita) the enormity of what lay ahead really hit me. I was about to visit the homeland of my great-grandparents and find out more about what has shaped two more generations of families including mine.

The best was yet to come. After a couple of enjoyable days on Rhodes, we set off for Kastellorizo. I had been told by so many the moment the island comes into view from the boat, you become quite emotional. This was so true. I was transfixed. I don't think I had ever seen such a beautiful place and then to know this was "my island" just filled me with pride and awe.

Shortly after this, we landed on "Kazzie" and as I departed from the boat, I began to experience the true joy of being on a student exchange. We were greeted by the students with warm embraces and flowers. It felt like no real introductions were necessary as the connection was there already.

It was obvious from the first day, the Kazzie way of life is one we can all learn from. The people are so relaxed; they take the time to be with others as evidenced by the constant groups of Kazzie people chatting away in coffee shops, looking happy and no real rush or urgency in whatever they do. This attitude was contagious and it was easy and very enjoyable to get into that mode too.

Apart from loving the lifestyle we immersed ourselves in, we also learnt so much about the history of Kazzie and visited some amazing sites. My favourite was the Blue Grotto and for those who have been, no explanation necessary (simply breathtaking)! But the beauty of island is more than skin deep. It is rich with history and the visit to the museum helped put into context so much of what I had learnt. My other special memories from Kastellorizo are swimming with the local students in the beautiful blue waters, meeting Kyria Despina and making traditional Kastellorizian sweets with her, and learning many valuable life lessons. I also loved seeing all the cats; I had never seen so many. I couldn't resist patting them.

Another special aspect was just reflecting constantly that this is where our sense of community began. My yiayia, Nina Pitsikas (nee Hatziyannakis), was the daughter of Polixeni (nee Moursellas) So my great grandmother lived in a house just behind a main café. I was able to find that spot and reflect that 100 years ago my great grandmother Polixeni (nee Moursellas) Yiannakis walked there as a child. And most likely so did my other great grandparents, Yianni Yiannakis, Panagiota (nee Zampazoglu) and Eleftherios Pitsikas.

Coming back from Kastellorizo, I feel I have become a whole new person. Every day I carry with me the memories from that gorgeous island, and when I think of them, I feel at home. I will forever cherish the opportunity I have been given, and cherish the lifelong friendships that come with it, not only the students that I met while in Greece, but the girls from Perth who were by my side the entire time- Ella and Mia.

From Kazzie, I learnt the true Greek spirit of bravery, integrity and companionship. I got to experience a Kazzie lifestyle, another language,

different food, a different school, new friends, and a new culture, but somehow still so closely linked to me. I want to try and strengthen the connections of our background with other youth living in Perth who also are of Kazzie descent.

For me, every day was like a dream, and I can't wait to go back 'home' again. I am proud to be an ABCD. (Australian Born Cazzie Daughter)!

Mia Gelavis

I was in Year 5 when I first heard about the Student Exchange Program on Kastellorizo, where some of my great grandparents were born. It excited me to think that I may be able to take part in this program one day, which became a reality this year, on the 30th of September 2019. When Kiralee, Ella and I got off the ferry, we were greeted with flowers and hats from the students of Kastellorizo, which made us feel instantly welcome. Immediately I felt a sense of connection with the land; I felt comfortable walking around the limani and wondered what Kastellorizo was like during the time when my great grandparents lived there. Walking around the limani with its varied and colourful houses, I spoke to so many people and felt like I was a part of the community and I saw the ruin of where my great grandmother's house once stood.

There were many highlights during the exchange program which gave me insight to my ancestry, culture and the history of the island. A favourite moment was swimming in the blue grotto as the sun reflected off the crystal blue water, making the cave luminescent. It was out of this world! I really enjoyed making delicious traditional food including, halva, strava and katoumari with Kyria Despina. Watching her cook was so fascinating; it looked like second nature for her to make these wonderful sweets. We tried to help her make katoumari, not very well I must say, but it was so much fun to cook it and well of course eat it! When we went on a hike, I didn't expect we would be going off tracks, exploring a secret room under St George of the Mountain Church and experiencing the true nature of Kastellorizo.

One of the highlights that stood out to me was listening and talking to Kyria Despina. She spoke about how she lived her day to day life on Kastellorizo since birth, how her family lived through the destruction of Kastellorizo and how they rebuilt their life. Kyria Despina was one of the passengers on the Empire Patrol that caught fire on return from Palestine. When the boat caught fire, she with her mother and all her siblings rushed to the front of the boat and had to jump off, grabbing pieces of wood to stay afloat. Her story saddened me, but she and her family had the determination to survive and leave no one behind, which has given me the inspiration to be more confident and courageous.

After experiencing the history, culture and exploring the beautiful island of Kastellorizo we went on to Rhodes. We went to the old city, we looked at old artefacts and paintings and learnt about its history. After exploring the old city we went to the temple of Apollo and watched the beautiful sunset over the sea.

Athens was a surprise to me, because of the transition from a close-knit community in Kastellorizo to a large European city. Athens had a lot to offer and so many memories I will keep forever. My favourite memories included learning the history of Greece, with the guide of an archaeologist, at the Acropolis Museum and the National Archaeological Museum. Being involved in volunteer work with Efrossini's students in Athens, was a great opportunity to step up to the plate and gather as much food as possible for the refugees. Working as a team was also a great experience to interact with new people. Meeting the students in Athens who were close to our age, was so memorable. We really got to know them after spending three days with them, talking about the differences between Greece and Australia and some of the problems that are going on in the world today. The students also described what their lifestyle is like in Greece, their hobbies and what they like to do in their spare time. Greek dancing in the streets of Athens was so much fun. They also surprised us with gifts which was so sweet; it felt like they had known us for a long time.

I feel privileged to have been part of the exchange and I have learnt so much about myself, my heritage, where my ancestors originated and what life was like for them over the years in Kastellorizo. I would like to thank all

the lovely people that we met throughout this exchange program; Efrossini and Stephanos for their patience and guidance of the three of us throughout the whole trip. Thank you to Marilyn and Friends of Kastellorizo, who made this great experience possible and one I will cherish for the rest of my life.

Ella Venoutsos

The Friends of Kastellorizo Student Exchange Program was an experience I'll never forget. I made many memories that will stay with me for life, along with friendships that will last a lifetime.

One of my favourite moments from when I was on Kastellorizo was spending time with Kyria Despina cooking with her and hearing her story. We visited her house multiple times while on Kastellorizo and had a cooking class from her. She taught us how to make halva, strava, and katoumari. I think this was such an important part of the trip because we had the chance to experience something that we would never be able to do on a holiday and it's something that helped me understand through her story the hardships that those on Kastellorizo went through to get to where the island is now.

Something else that made the experience so great was meeting the students from Kastellorizo and Athens. When we arrived on the island the students were waiting there to greet us with flowers and hats and brought our luggage to the hotel for us. Having such a welcoming experience on the island shows the sense of community especially as when we were walking around the island, people we had never met before were welcoming us as they knew we were coming. Throughout the week we caught up with the students from the school, we went swimming and had lunch with them on several occasions. Also in Athens, we saw the students from the language school, who we saw every day while we were there and spent a lot of time with them. I know that even though they live on the other side of the world that we will maintain friendships with them for many years to come and hopefully it won't be long before we see them again.

Learning the stories of many different Kastellorizians and learning about the history of the island showed me what I had missed when I had previously been to the island. There is so much rich history and culture that I discovered on the trip that I wouldn't have been able to find otherwise.

Hearing about the history of the island through the museums and hearing Kyria Despina's story helped me put in place what I had researched for my family history project. I could see the effect of each of the occupations on the island. Each part of the island showed a different story and a different part of history which was very interesting. Hearing and reading about a lot of individual stories was really interesting as they all had different experiences about the same events which had different effects on each of the people and their families.

The exchange really made me grateful for how easy my life is and makes me realise how much my ancestors have done for me so that I don't have to go through what they did to get where I am today. I can now fully appreciate all of the hardships that they went through to get me and my family where we are today.

I am really happy that I took this opportunity. It taught me about the history and culture of the island, opened up many opportunities for friendship, helped me gain independence and become more responsible along with being a fun and exciting trip. Overall this was an amazing trip and I would recommend it to anyone who has the chance to go on it.



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Βιωματικό Ταξίδι στη Γη των Προγόνων

Ευφροσύνη Ζώνιου - Στέφανος Ζώης, Αθήνα

ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΑΝΤΑΛΛΑΓΗΣ ΜΑΘΗΤΩΝ 2019

Έχοντας ζήσει τρία χρόνια στο Καστελόριζο, η Ευφροσύνη Ζώνιου, εκπαιδευτικός, και ο σύζυγός της, Στέφανος Ζώης, πρώην διευθυντής του καταστήματος Μεγίστης της Εθνικής Τράπεζας, ανέλαβαν φέτος την επιμέλεια-σχεδιασμό του προγράμματος δραστηριοτήτων του Προγράμματος Ανταλλαγής Μαθητών καθώς και την επιμέλεια των συμμετεχόντων μαθητριών στην Ελλάδα.

Εδώ και μια δεκαετία ο φορέας Friends of Kastellorizo φέρνει κοντά τους νέους του νησιού και των αποδήμων Καστελориζιών στην Αυστραλία, δίνοντάς τους τη δυνατότητα για λίγο διάστημα να επισκεφτούν η μια κοινότητα την άλλη και να γνωρίσουν τη ζωή της μέσω του εκπαιδευτικού Προγράμματος Ανταλλαγής Μαθητών.

Φέτος, όπως κάθε δυο χρόνια, όταν το Πρόγραμμα αφορά Αυστραλούς εφήβους Καστελориζιτικής καταγωγής, φιλοξενήθηκαν στην Ελλάδα οι Mía Gelanis, Kirralee Pitsikas και Ella Venoutsos, με σκοπό να γνωρίσουν την ιδιαίτερη τους πατρίδα, τη γλώσσα της, την ιστορία της, την πολιτιστική της κληρονομιά, τη σύγχρονη ζωή και τους ανθρώπους της Ελλάδας αλλά και να προσφέρουν αλληλέγγυα εθελοντική εργασία.

Ως επιμελητές του προγράμματος δραστηριοτήτων, ο στόχος μας ήταν διττός: αφ' ενός, οι δραστηριότητες να είναι ποικιλόμορφες ώστε από τα διαφορετικά ερεθίσματα να σχηματιστεί μια αντιπροσωπευτική εικόνα του νησιού και της χώρας από την αρχαιότητα μέχρι σήμερα· αφ' ετέρου, αυτή η εμπειρία ζωής να είναι βιωματική.

Οι περιηγήσεις στα κύρια μουσεία και αρχαιολογικούς χώρους του Καστελόριζου, της Ρόδου και της Αθήνας, απαραίτητες για τη γνωριμία με το παρελθόν και τον πολιτισμό του νησιού και της χώρας, απέκτησαν ζωντάνια χάρη στις ξεναγήσεις (στα αγγλικά) από αρχαιολόγους στο Μουσείο Ακρόπολης και στο Εθνικό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο. Η παρακολούθηση παραστάσεων όπως Σικελικά Δράματα, εμπνευσμένη από το έργο του Θουκυδίδη για τη Σικελική Εκστρατεία, και Οι Πέτρες Μιλούν, απαγγελίες θεμελιωδών αρχαίων κειμένων στο αίθριο του Μουσείου Ακρόπολης, επέτρεψε επιπλέον τη σύνδεση με τα εκθέματα και τις αποκτιθείσες γνώσεις από τα μουσεία.

Εκτός από τη μουσειακή αγωγή, με τους περιπάτους στον οικισμό και στο βουνό, οι μαθήτριες ανίχνευσαν βιωματικά τις οικογενειακές τους ρίζες, τη ζωή και τη μακρόχρονη ιστορία του νησιού, παρατηρώντας τα διαχρονικά αποτυπώματά της στον τόπο: στα αρχαιολογικά απομεινάρια, στην αρχιτεκτονική, στα μνημεία, στις εκκλησίες, στα κτίσματα και στο τοπίο.

Κύρια βιωματική εμπειρία, όμως, αποτέλεσαν η επαφή που επιδιώξαμε με τους ανθρώπους και οι ζωντανές μαρτυρίες τους. Από τη νέα γενιά οι μαθήτριες άκουσαν για τη σύγχρονη ζωή, ενώ από τις παλαιότερες για τους προγόνους τους, για την ένδοξη μα και πολύπαθη ιστορία του νησιού αλλά και για τις παραδόσεις του. Βαθιά τις άγγιξε η Κυρά Δέσποινα Μάτσου με τις γλαφυρές αφηγήσεις και τα τραγούδια της για την παιδική της ηλικία στα τραγικά χρόνια της κατοχής και της προσφυγιάς, αναδεικνύοντας πόσο συνυφασμένη είναι η Μεγάλη Ιστορία του Καστελόριζου και της Ελλάδας με τη Μικρή Ιστορία των ανθρώπων. Ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον τούς προκάλεσε η συζήτηση στο εργαστήριο του Αλέξανδρου Ζυγούρη για την τέχνη και το πρόσφατο παρελθόν του νησιού. Η Λόλα Βενίτη, η Άννα Σαμσάκου και ο Αντώνης Πατινιώτης τις πληροφόρησαν για τους συγγενείς τους. Σ' ένα ανεπανάληπτο μάθημα με την Κυρά Δέσποινα Μάτσου έγιναν πραγματικά παραδοσιακές Καστελориζιές νοικοκυρές, που ζύμωσαν, άνοιξαν φύλλο και έφτιαξαν στραβά, κατουμάρια και χαλβά της νύφης.

Αυτό που συγκίνησε περισσότερο τις μαθήτριες κατά τη διαμονή τους στην Ελλάδα ήταν η καθολική ανταπόκριση των Αρχών και της κοινωνίας, η φιλοξενία και η γενναιοδωρία τους, που τις έκαναν να νιώσουν το Καστελόριζο και την Αθήνα τόπο τους.

Η θερμή υποδοχή από το Δήμο Μεγίστης, τόσο στο λιμάνι, όσο και στο δημαρχείο, με την απονομή αναμνηστικών δώρων, καθώς και η παράθεση γεύματος και κεράσματος, προκάλεσαν αίσθηση. Η υποδοχή στο λιμάνι από τους μαθητές του νησιού συνοδεία των καθηγητών, με τα ευγενικά δώρα, καθώς και οι προσκλήσεις σε κοινές δραστηριότητες υπήρξαν σημαντικές στιγμές της διαμονής τους. Οι προσφερόμενες θαλάσσιες εκδρομές σε εμβληματικά σημεία αποτέλεσαν αξιομνημόνευτες εμπειρίες.

Στην Αθήνα η πρόσκληση από την κα Ειρήνη Γλυμακοπούλου, ιδιοκτήτρια του φροντιστηρίου ξένων γλωσσών όπου εργάζομαι, σε συζήτηση με τους μαθητές για τη ζωή των νέων στην Αυστραλία και στην Ελλάδα, και κατόπιν σε γεύμα, καθώς και κοινές δράσεις τις επόμενες μέρες, όπως η συμμετοχή σε εθελοντική εργασία με τους φορείς ΜΠΟΡΟΥΜΕ και THE HELLENIC INITIATIVE AUSTRALIA, οδήγησαν στη δημιουργία νέων φιλιών με τους Αθηναίους μαθητές.



Το φετινό εκπαιδευτικό πρόγραμμα, πλούσιο και ποικίλο σε δραστηριότητες και ανθρώπινες επαφές, μπορεί να καταγραφεί ως απόλυτα επιτυχές. Στη φετινή επιτυχία, καθοριστική ήταν, εκτός από την προσφορά των συνήθων συνεργατών και χορηγών, και η ανιδιοτελής συνδρομή πολλών ανθρώπων, φορέων και Αρχών της Ελλάδας: σε όλους απονέμονται θερμές ευχαριστίες. Προσδοκούμε στην εκ νέου αρμονική συνεργασία μαζί τους σε μελλοντικές διοργανώσεις του Προγράμματος Ανταλλαγής Μαθητών.

Ευχαριστούμε (με αλφαβητική σειρά)

τη Γενική Γραμματεία Απόδημου Ελληνισμού, που εξασφάλισε ελεύθερη είσοδο σε όλα τα μουσεία και αρχαιολογικούς χώρους, το μοναδικό προνόμιο των κατ' εξαίρεση ξεναγήσεων καθώς και προσκλήσεις στη θεατρική παράσταση Σικελικά Δράματα. Η συμβολή του Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών παρά τις δύσκολες συνθήκες αποδεικνύει τη συνεχή μέριμνα του Ελληνικού Κράτους για την Ομογένεια. Ευχαριστούμε επίσης για την εγκάρδια υποδοχή των μαθητριών στο υπουργείο.

το Δήμο Μεγίστης και τον αρμόδιο Αντιδήμαρχο, κ. Στράτο Αμύγδαλο, για τη γενναιοδωρία και την έμπρακτη στήριξή τους.

το Δήμο Πέρθης, Μέγα Χορηγό, για τη διαχρονική ευγενική χορηγία στο Πρόγραμμα.

τη Δημοτική Πινakoθήκη Ρόδου και την Πρόεδρό της, κα Σουμέλα Καραχάλιου, για την υποδοχή και την προσφορά αναμνηστικών αφισών.

τη Διεύθυνση Δευτεροβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης Δωδεκανήσου για την έγκριση της φιλοξενίας των μαθητριών στη Σαντραπεία Σχολή και τη Λυκείαρχη της κα Μπέττυ Μούζακ.

το Σύνδεσμο Καστελориζιών Δυτικής Αυστραλίας για τη διαχρονική ευγενική χορηγία στο Πρόγραμμα.

το Σύνδεσμο Μεγιστών Κυριών Δυτικής Αυστραλίας για τη διαχρονική ευγενική χορηγία στο Πρόγραμμα.

την κα Ειρήνη Γλυμακοπούλου για τη φιλοξενία, τη συνεργασία και τη γενναιοδωρία της.

τους κατοίκους του Καστελόριζου, που αγκάλιασαν τις μαθήτριες και, με ενδιαφέρον και γενναιοδωρία, προσέφεραν κεράσματα, το χρόνο τους, τη γνώση τους ή και τις υπηρεσίες τους αφιλοκεδώς. Ειδικότερα (με αλφαβητική σειρά)

τη Λόλα Βενίτη για την προνομιακή μεταχείριση στο εστιατόριό της.

τη Δέσποινα Μάτσου για τη φιλοξενία, τις προσωπικές μαρτυρίες, τα μαθήματα ζαχαροπλαστικής και, γενικά, τη συνεχή συνδρομή της στο Πρόγραμμα.

τη Μέριαν Μίταρου για την προσφορά γεύματος.

την Άννα Σαμσάκου, που μας άνοιξε τα εκκλησάκια στα Χωράφια.

τον Αλέξανδρο Ζυγούρη για τις πληροφορίες για την ιστορία του Καστελόριζου.

τον Μιχάλη Καραβέλατζη για την επίσκεψη στη Γαλάζια Σπηλιά και τη μεταφορά των αποσκευών στο λιμάνι.

τον Νεκτάριο Καραβέλατζη για το γύρο του νησιού και της Ρω.

τους μαθητές του Καστελόριζου για τη γενναιοδωρία και τη φιλοξενία τους.

τον Αντώνη Πατινιώτη για τη μεταφορά στο νησί του Αϊ Γιώργη.

τους μαθητές του φροντιστηρίου Γλυμακοπούλου για την εγκαρδιότητα της υποδοχής, τα ευγενικά αισθήματα, τη συγκινητική συμπαράσταση, και τη γενναιοδωρή συμπεριφορά τους.

τη Θεώνη και τον Νικ Μίταρο για, μεταξύ άλλων, τη διακριτική και αμέριστη συμπαράστασή τους.

τη Μέριλυν Τσολάκη, Συντονίστρια του Friends of Kastellorizo, για την οργάνωση, τη γραμματειακή υποστήριξη, τη διαθεσιμότητα και την αμέριστη υποστήριξή της.