



**OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE PUBLICATION –
“KASTELLORIZO: MY ODYSSEY” AN ILLUSTRATED
CHILDREN’S HISTORY**

*Written by Marilyn Tsolakis and J Andrew Johnstone
Illustrated by Dr Platon Alexiou*

**BY
HIS EXCELLENCY DR KEN MICHAEL, AC
GOVERNOR OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

SUNDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2010

*Mr Nick Mitaros, Director of Australian Friends of Kastellorizo,
and Mrs Theona Mitaros*

Co-authors - Marilyn Tsolakis and Andrew Johnstone

*Councillor James Limnios, representing the Rt Hon the Lord
Mayor of Perth*

*Mr Eythymios Mexis (EF-THIMIOS MEXIS), Vice-Consul,
representing the Consul of Greece in Perth*

Dr Norman Ashton

Friends of Kastellorizo

Ladies and Gentlemen

Julie and I are delighted to be here for the launch of *Kastellorizo: My Odyssey*. This wonderful, enlightening and beautifully presented children's history book – written by Marilyn Tsolakis and Andrew Johnston with colourful illustrations by Dr Platon Alexiou – provides a great insight into island life and its history from ancient to modern times. Though written for children and young people, it holds wide appeal for adults as well. Importantly, it is expressed in both the Greek and English languages.

I have enjoyed reading the story immensely and it brought back many family memories as well other stories that have played such a crucial role in the life and times of Kastellorizo.

Both my parents and Julie's father were from Kastellorizo, so this book has special personal appeal and the story it relates has special significance for us, as it will, I am sure, for many of you here this afternoon.

The strength, and a special feature of the story, is that it is told through the voice of the land itself. This is a unique way to portray the tone of the book. That voice of the land, telling its own story, somehow poignantly enjoins and immerses us into this little island's history.

The story is about the people, the places and the landscape of Kastellorizo, so effectively told through the heartfelt words of the authors and through the impressive illustrations of the artist.

The story begins by the land expressing itself in the following way:

“I am an old land shaped by fire, wind and water.

I am a rock, surrounded by the blue Mediterranean Sea.

I have craggy, mountainous valleys that lead to the sapphire in my crown – my marvellous deep harbour – the Limani, offering safe anchorage to ships.”

Marilyn Tsolakis took this approach since she felt that only the island itself had seen every generation that has lived on its rocky shores – from ancient Greece to the present. And only the island itself could feel the emotion and love for the island transcending all generations during its long history. Andrew’s idea of structuring the story around an odyssey provided the framework for the narrative. This is a very innovative approach and congratulations to both authors for choosing to present this compelling story in this way.

Just as expressed by Dr Norman Ashton, who has had a close connection with Kastellorizo personally and through his own classical studies and who says in his comments about the book:

“The island speaks to us and engages us, touching our hearts and our minds”

It truly is a story of a great odyssey, and as the book notes, it is one that tells of times that have been:

“tragic and exciting, dramatic but hopeful, of a little island in the far eastern Mediterranean, and its indomitable people”.

Nicholas Pappas, another well known historian and known for his studies of the island, says this story is a “*poetic tale*” that will draw children:

“across the sweep of centuries in an almost fairytale way, while also re-kindling our own memories of stories heard from proud grandparents many years ago”.

These are sentiments I am sure you will feel once you have read the book.

I would like to congratulate the Australian Friends of Kastellorizo on this project. I know that it was undertaken as one of the cultural and educational projects in the AFK’s charter that has been developed to promote a positive future for the island and to keep its people, many of whom live in Perth, informed about cultural traditions that are part of their heritage.

There is, especially, an important educational element associated with the vision of AFK and this book represents just one of its initiatives. There is also a student exchange program taking place with Kastellorizo. Julie and I had the pleasure of welcoming to Government House students involved from Kastellorizo – Konstantinos Amygdalos and Ilias Martalas – and from St Andrew's Grammar – Anthony Komninos and Yiannis Ragoussis – to hear a personal account of their experiences.

These educational opportunities are particularly important for our children and young people. The book being launched today will enhance this educational initiative as a popular and important way to inform them of their heritage and the important qualities demonstrated by their ancestors – qualities such as determination and resilience regardless of the many obstacles they confronted during the island's long and turbulent history.

We would all agree, I am sure, that those qualities were important to the success of those Kastellorizians who migrated to Australian shores and made new homes and lives here. As well, those qualities have ultimately helped to shape Australian society, along with the many cultures who have come to Australia, not forgetting the cultural influences of the First Australians, the Indigenous people who lived for millennia before the first immigrants.

But as the book describes, people from Kastellorizo were used to leaving their island home – not by choice but by necessity whether through warfare or other calamities. Many people over the centuries were forced to leave to find new ways of making a living, and, more recently, most often on the other side of the world.

Kastellorizo was, as the book so aptly notes, “*a soft target for invaders*” during the centuries.

This is reflected through its long and rich history dating back to the first settlers in ancient times.

This brief, yet compelling, children's history captures this sentiment, while acknowledging key milestones along the way, some tragic, some heartening, yet so familiar, such as the pirate attacks; the Knights of St John in the 14th century; the name change over three thousand years from Megisti to Castello Rosso to Kastellorizo; the long period of Ottoman rule; the Greek war of independence; the construction of the Church of Saints Constantine and Helene, the island's Patron Saints; the boys and girl schools; the advent of power boats and their devastating impact on sailing ships as used on the island; World War I and French possession; Italian occupation, the Greco-Turkish war, the earthquake and World War II; the fate of the ship *Empire Patrol* as it was returning some Kastellorizians home from Port Said in 1945; and, the reunification with Greece in 1948.

The story then unfolds to relate the land's view that:

“ ... intense poverty and my lack of fertile land meant my people had to leave for opportunities in foreign places.”

The people who remained behind maintained the island to make “*it possible for many to one day return*”. And it would not surprise you to read of the Lady of Rho, who “*raised the Greek flag everyday on the island at great danger to herself*”, to make sure that everyone knew that the land belonged to Greece.

Supporting these events in the book is a well structured timeline as a very informative and useful reference, enhancing even more this well researched, written and illustrated book.

However, this is a story ultimately of survival and hope – and we have seen that in the 21st century with many people returning to rebuild their family homes bringing the hope of new prosperity for the people of Kastellorizo.

This a very impressive book, both in the story it so cleverly tells and the beautiful illustrations in support , which together embrace the very essence of what it means to be Kastellorizian.

I am certain it will be very popular as an intriguing and tantalising means to tell the great story of Kastellorizo to a wide audience, whetting their appetite for more. You cannot help but be drawn into the story once you begin to read it. It is both compelling and touching. A children's story, yes, but fittingly reaching out to us all.

Congratulations again to Marilyn and Andrew. I am aware that the project has taken about two years in total to complete – from Marilyn visiting the island with Dr Platon Alexiou in 2008 to organise the beautiful illustrations we have before us, to the writing which began in September last year and the translation that began in March this year.

Our congratulations and thanks to all those who guided and supported the writing, illustrating, reviewing, designing and printing of *Kastellorizo: My Odyssey*.

The value of everyone's involvement will be seen through the active engagement of the community, while continuing to provide the cultural and educational connection with Kastellorizo through the good work of the Australian Friends of Kastellorizo. To this end, the proceeds of the sale of this book will be used to continue their good work.

I commend and congratulate AFK, as we all should, for their passionate commitment in wanting to bring us closer to the island of Kastellorizo, in keeping with their aim *“to help create a positive future for Kastellorizo, recognising our proud heritage, and giving something back to the island of our forebears”*.

It is a wonderful outcome, one that has an important place in our shared history and a story that can be cherished by all.

I can finish in no better way than to refer to the concluding remarks in this wonderful book:

“ ... for every welcome there is a farewell.

For every farewell, there is the hope of a heartfelt reunion.

My odyssey is one of leaving, and once again, returning.

That is Kastellorizo and I am Kastellorizo, and Megisti too I am ... and my odyssey continues.”

It now gives me great pleasure to officially launch *Kastellorizo: My Odyssey* and wish it and the Australian Friends of Kastellorizo every success.

I would also like to congratulate and thank all those involved in the project through sponsorship and support. These people include:

For proof reading and historical accuracy: Dr Norman Ashton, Nick Pappas, Nick Bogiatzis, Kyriakos Hondros and Dr Platon Alexiou;

For sponsorship to print the book: Peter Kailis, the late Theo Kailis, Maria Halikis, Michael Kailis, Katrina Ventouras and Victor Kailis;

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For providing the important stewardship of the book, George Kailis and Nick Mitaros.