

On Connecting

by Vasiliki Nihás, Canberra



*Vasiliki Nihás is a published author of short stories including **Conversations with Yiayia**, and the principal of **Voyaging Pty Ltd**, a consultancy firm advising on cultural diversity and equity issues.*

How do libraries meet the diverse needs of their users? At a recent conference, MyLanguage, addressing the needs of migrants and refugees, a Kastellorizian case study was examined, through a paper: **Margaritari Mou, Kastellorizo: Creating Connections across Continents**. In it, I addressed the way established diaspora communities such as the Greek community can use library resources, particularly technology, to better connect with their source countries and communities.

We of Kastellorizian origin are in the privileged position of having been a strong presence in Australia over several generations. Technology and imaginative community leadership have taken us beyond simply connecting one Kastellorizian Australian to another. Australian Friends of Kastellorizo, with the technology of the Web, has created Filia which now supports us to connect across continents. Kastellorizian Australians are today reaching back to the very place our forebears left. We can enter into meaningful dialogue, across generations, and across continents. Connecting enables us to work together, giving back something to the island for which we all share a deeply visceral love.

Here I simply wish to reflect on one part of the paper. That is, why do we seek these connections?

We are indeed scattered, a diaspora community living in Australia, not Kastellorizo, for the main part. So, what are we thinking of in pursuing such a connection. What sends my father in pursuit of any Greek news mentioning Kastellorizo so that he can assiduously report back to his daughter anything she may have missed in newspapers or on SBS? Are we simply romantics wallowing in nostalgia? Are we fantasists who imagine Kastellorizo to be the centre of the universe? Or obsessives who simply know that it is so! Why are songs composed about it? Why does it get written up in *Gourmet Traveller*? After all, some sceptical possibly soulless Frenchman viewed it as an insignificant pebble, so how did it become a margaritari or The Pearl of the Levant? (Note: For the answer read Nicholas Pappas, *Near Eastern Dreams*). So why is there such a palpable need to connect with this pebble?

Objectively speaking, Kastellorizo is a tiny, (albeit staggeringly beautiful) Greek island in the Eastern Mediterranean, indeed the most eastern port of the European Union. However, its size belies

its historical and geographical significance and the turbulent past which directed its diaspora. It has been coveted and occupied by the Ottomans, the French, the Italians and the British. The seeds it has sown abroad are the product of a history of traders, seagoing merchants who plied the Mediterranean, many displaced by war and earthquake. Most left its shores reluctantly and with sorrow that the conspiracy of circumstances forced their departure. However, the pull of this island has been so strong that it has tugged at the hearts and minds of its children's children. It seems to me, that often the need to connect comes out of the already forged connection between grandparent and grandchild. That connection is deeply emotional. It is like plunging hands into a well and pulling up ancestry, heritage and belonging in a precious net woven by a grandparent's stories and spells.

For my Yiayia, Kastellorizo was home, a home of which she had been deprived and for which she wept. Life was a series of accommodations and contradictions and competing pulls. Yiayia lived her contradictions rather than reading about or analysing them. But reading was a prerequisite to attaining education which was shorthand for the promise of the future. So the need to read was instilled into each of us. Yiayia would never have gone into a library in Australia but she continued to read Greek newspapers and became familiar enough with technology to commit to soap operas on daytime television. I am not sure she was made for the computer age and I am willing to bet that virtual reality may not have had much appeal for her but she knew how to tell stories. She told them with the emotion and passion that befits a true Kastellorizian drama queen. She imbued in us a love for a place we had never seen, a place which was not accessible to us except through her imagination and spell casting. A mysterious place where her pirate grandfather played a central role, cast as a revolutionary hero who found time to steal away his youthful bride and carry her off to Kastellorizo where they produced nine offspring. Yiayia's storytelling made us feel that Kastellorizo was not just a physical entity but a space of belonging, a tangible emotional connection. When grandparents do their job as she did, the passion and the connection whose heart is love, is surely passed on.

MyLanguage was launched as a portal providing access to search engines, web directories and news in over sixty languages. The paper and Conference Responses and Directions are available at www.MyLanguage.com

Australian Friend

A Profile of Two Local Kastellorizians

by Marilyn Tsolakis, Perth



Mrs Loula Hondros

Some of you may know Loula (Andreana) Hondros and may have chatted with her on your walks near St George of the Well Church. Her house is emblazoned with the striking pink bougainvillea that provides a contrast to the sombre black she wears symbolising that she is still in mourning from the death of her husband, Mihali (Michael) Hondros, who was a former Mayor of Kastellorizo.

Or perhaps, you observed her emerge from her house after siesta time about 6.00pm where she sits, watching the tourists walk by, or chatting with a few of her neighbours. When I first sat down to speak with Mrs Loula Hondros, she was reticent, but as she slowly warmed to the idea of sharing her story, her quiet voice broke into a patriotic rendition of the Greek National Anthem and then to my surprise, she delighted in telling me her love story, emitting a giggle or two in the telling.

Mrs Loula Hondros was meant to go to Australia, however, she was reluctant because she feared seasickness. Mihali worked at the Council, and as it turns out he was smitten, after seeing her walk by one day. Mihali asked the Council Cleaner to be the matchmaker by delivering a message, threatening to withhold the cleaner's pay if she did not obey him. It is as if the gods sent Hermes to secure the love match.

After giving Loula the note, Loula responded by saying that it was highly inappropriate to come directly to her. All matters of love had to be dealt with by parents, particularly the father as was the custom. The Mayor at the time, Evangelos Kondilios, accompanied Mihali to speak to her father. Although her father did not have a dowry in gold, they married nevertheless, which shows that the magical attraction between them was more powerful than any dowry transaction. Loula commented on his good looks and his fairness that would make any young girl drool, perhaps he was a descendant from Adonis. They were married on Kastellorizo at Sts Constantine and Helene Cathedral in 1949. She has two sons, Kyriakos and George.

Her story is typical of many who became refugees in 1939-40 during the war, evacuating first to Antifilo (Kas), then to Cyprus and Palestine. The very nature of being a refugee meant that they could not take any belongings with them. They were given lots of food, relative freedom and did not encounter many problems with the Arabs. Except for one! Loula leaned forward with a wry grin and told me that an Arab wanted to buy her for his harem. Men obviously noticed her.

After three years, she was one of the luckier ones returning from Palestine on the second boat, because the third boat, was the ill fated Empire Patrol that caught fire and sank, taking 33 Kastellorizian lives.. When asked about her life in Palestine, she was restricted to domestic chores such as washing clothes in running water and drying them on boulders, knitting and crocheting. They lived in a galvanised iron shed typical of army barracks with bedspreads separating families. Her father, Yiorgos Eleftheriou, stood guard at night to make sure food was not stolen. She tells of one night when they thought they were being bombed; however, it turned out to be young boys throwing stones on the roof.

Upon returning to Kastellorizo in 1942, after the war, there was more heartbreak when they saw their homes had been looted by the Ghurkas, who served in the British Army. Important documents also went missing.

As I heard Loula's refugee story, I could not help but wonder about the challenges faced by refugees around the world today. All displaced people are in search of security for their families. People trying to make the best of the life they are given. Such courage and resilience of people like Loula, makes we wonder how we would cope if faced with a similar situation. No doubt we can learn lessons from our forebears.

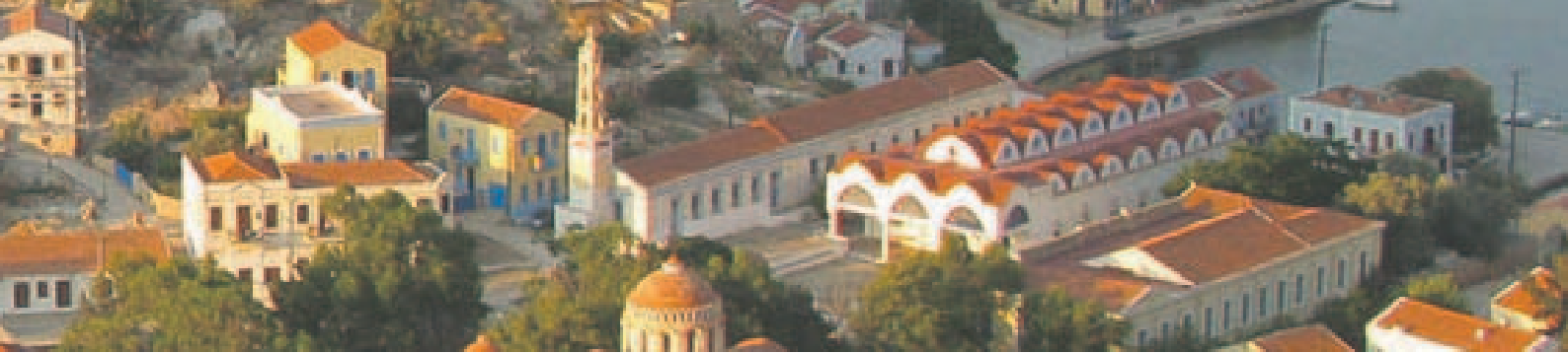
I would like to thank Paul and Eva Tsolakis (Sydney) for sitting with me at the interview to 'break the ice' and to translate some words. Their familiarity with their neighbor Loula assisted in opening up the discussion.



As you walk by the harbour, near the central square, there is a hive of activity at the corner shop owned by Mihali Hatziyiakomis, otherwise known affectionately as the Blind Man. He sells postcards, souvenirs, phone cards, books and many other items. His business thrives as the boats come in from all over the world to this very remote island, only 2.7kms from Turkey. Sailors literally step from their boats into his shop in search of cigarettes, perhaps, or the daily newspaper.

When I speak to him, I introduce myself as Mihali Tsolakis' daughter and a compatriot smile lights up his face.

"I know your father."



A Profile of Two Local Kastellorizians (cont.)

The social etiquette of asking after him ensued as well as the obligatory, "Give him my regards."

There are 4 years separating the two of them; my father being more senior. This bond connects us, as I try to find out more about this gentle, unassuming man whose life had seen hard times, both personally and politically. He was born in 1925, and attended school like every other child, but sadly was unaware that he was developing a visual impairment.

Although he read and wrote, he did not go to the doctor immediately when he detected problems with his vision. And it was too late when he did visit the doctor to rectify the problem with his optical nerve. He went to Athens to learn Braille for two years. It is this skill that astounded me, when I saw him use his tactile senses to work out the amount of money given to him by customers and then to be even more amazed at seeing him issue the correct change.

Mihali remembers the way of life as a boy in understated, but nostalgic terms.

"When I was a young boy, people lived in harmony even though we were under the Italians. They were kind to us and we did not have too many problems, other than being under foreign rule."

He learned Italian for four hours per week while Mussolini was in power. He remembers the Germans bombing Kastellorizo in 1943. Mihali was very matter of fact and pragmatic in the telling of these details.

After school, he worked in a shop selling cigarettes and learned the art of business and shop keeping from an early age. No doubt this explains how he came to be in his business for 40 years.

While life has been difficult, he did not complain, but gave gentle recognition and acceptance of his situation. He never married, but he is much loved by his relatives and greatly admired by those who have come to know him. Mihali Hatziziakomis is one of Kastellorizo's local characters who adds to the island's charm.

A Promise Fulfilled

by Suzy Ohl (nee Romanos), Perth



Have you ever felt the desire to do something, but because of mitigating circumstances it does not always happen? Then one day, you achieve that lifelong dream. Suzy Ohl, shares her emotional pilgrimage to Kastellorizo in 2010 fulfilling a life-long pledge to her grandfather.

My dream was to see the Cathedral of Saints Constantine & Helene where my grandfather, Captain Athanasios Stavrianou, tou Kakulas, married my grandmother, Diassoulou (Asimina) tou Miriti in the 1890's and where their children were baptised, including my mother Konstandina who they named LEMONIA. She was the fifth daughter in a long line of daughters. What do you have to do for the next child to be a boy? My family has this belief that you call the daughter, LEMONIA. I am not sure where

this folk-lore came from, but it worked. My mother's next child was a boy who they named 'George'. Sadly, however, he died a few weeks later. I know of other families where this has happened and healthy boys were produced.

One of the locals told me that the cathedral is the richest in all of the Dodecanese Islands and is nicknamed "The Church of the Kapetanious" (Captains), because all the captains on the island rallied to provide raw materials from many countries to build this cathedral. I felt so proud of my grandfather and his three younger brothers: Evangelos, Vartalamos & Paraskevas. They obviously were a part of it.

Another moving experience was viewing the video, *The History of the Island 1900 to 1948*. I became emotional when a wedding group shown in the documentary included my grandfather's brother, Evangelos marrying Triantafilia Mallis. The coincidence was that I was carrying in my personal belongings a rather large photo of the wedding. My mother was sitting in the front as a five year old. In the late 1900's my grandfather helped many families migrate to Western Australia via Alexandria and Egypt.

Unfortunately, my grandfather's family never made it to Australia. My grandmother chose to stay in Egypt, and with the Great Depression my grandfather lost his ship. Before he died in 1936, he made me promise to go to Australia. It was only in the early 1950's that my widowed mother, my twin brother and I were able to fulfill this wish.

And now, it was my wish to return to my birthplace to reconnect with my spiritual ancestors and to whisper to my grandfather that I had fulfilled his wish.

Islands of Kastellorizo

Anastasia Diamond - 100th Birthday

by Nicholas Pappas, Sydney



Anastasia Diamond nee Kambouris - 100 years young!

Anastasia Diamond was born on Kastellorizo on 25 April 1911 to Nikolaos Pavlou Kambouris & his wife, Argyro (nee Samiou), and was the youngest of seven children. She was named 'Anastasia' after Anastasia Arnaoutoglou, a close friend of her mother's family who served as a schoolteacher on the island for many years.

Her father (d. Kastellorizo 1938) owned a two-masted caique, the Megiste, and he was a seagoing merchant who traded in goods and foodstuffs. Her mother's family was equally prominent on Kastellorizo with her aunt, Maria, also serving for

many years as a teacher in the island's school for girls, and her uncle, Evangelos, serving as a priest on the island and in Kalamaki on the opposite Anatolian coastline.

Her family home on the island was located on the Kavos waterfront, near the square then known as Mési tou Yialoú, between the Kontouzoglou and Askitis houses. Anastasia still has vivid memories of the ground shaking in her home as the severe earthquake of 18 March 1926 rocked the island and destroyed many nearby homes.

Reflective of the breadth of the Kastellorizian diaspora, Anastasia's siblings settled as far afield as Brazil, New York and Sydney, where their descendants continue to reside.

Anastasia arrived in Sydney in 1936 to marry another Kastellorizian, Anastasios Markou Diamandaras (Richard Diamond). They had 3 children, and in addition to her 2 surviving children, Maria and Nick, Anastasia has 8 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren.

Anastasia has lived at the Kastellorizian Nursing Home in Kensington, Sydney for the past 3 years and will be celebrating her 100th birthday at the Yarra Bay Sailing Club in La Perouse, with her family.

Student Exchange

by Kostantinos Amygdalos & Ilias Martalas, Kastellorizo

Kastellorizo

9-12-2010

To the organisers of Friends of Kastellorizo,

We would like to thank you for the opportunity you gave us to visit Australia. This Student Exchange program is very important for the children of the island, but also for the children in Australia. They can learn about the culture and customs of each country. Also the children can make new friends from various cities and continue to communicate with them. The opportunity you gave us last August 2010 has not been lost. My fellow class-mate and I learned so much about your country. We made new friends and visited new places that will never be forgotten. Everything was fantastic in the four cities we visited and we got to know the four families who hosted us in their homes. We want to thank them for their hospitality. We would also like to thank the schools of St Andrew's in Perth, St Spyridon in Sydney and "Sts Anargyri" Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College, in Melbourne for allowing us to participate in their school life and we hope we helped to inform the students about their Greek Studies at their schools.

We would like the Student Exchange program to continue, because we know that other young people would like to visit your country. Thank you once again.

With Respect,

Kostantinos Amygdalos & Ilias Martalas





Children's Illustrated History Kastellorizo: My Odyssey

The first bi-lingual children's history for children and adults alike is nearly sold out with only 80 books remaining. AFK will not be printing anymore. It is a hard cover, high quality limited edition book selling at \$39.95. If you do not want to miss out, you might like to purchase a book by contacting the AFK coordinator.

Books available also from:

Foreign Language Bookshop in Collins St, Melbourne and Hay St, Perth.

Lane Book Shop, Claremont, WA

NSW Kastellorizian Ladies' Auxiliary – Victoria Kazaglis Gallagher
02 96627330

The West Australian newspaper reviewed Kastellorizo: My Odyssey on 21 December 2010 saying that the "children's book will capture the hearts and minds of not just people from Kastellorizo, but also those who appreciate culture, history and a beautiful story."

The following quotes from people who have already purchased a copy may help you to understand the importance of this educational/cultural project.

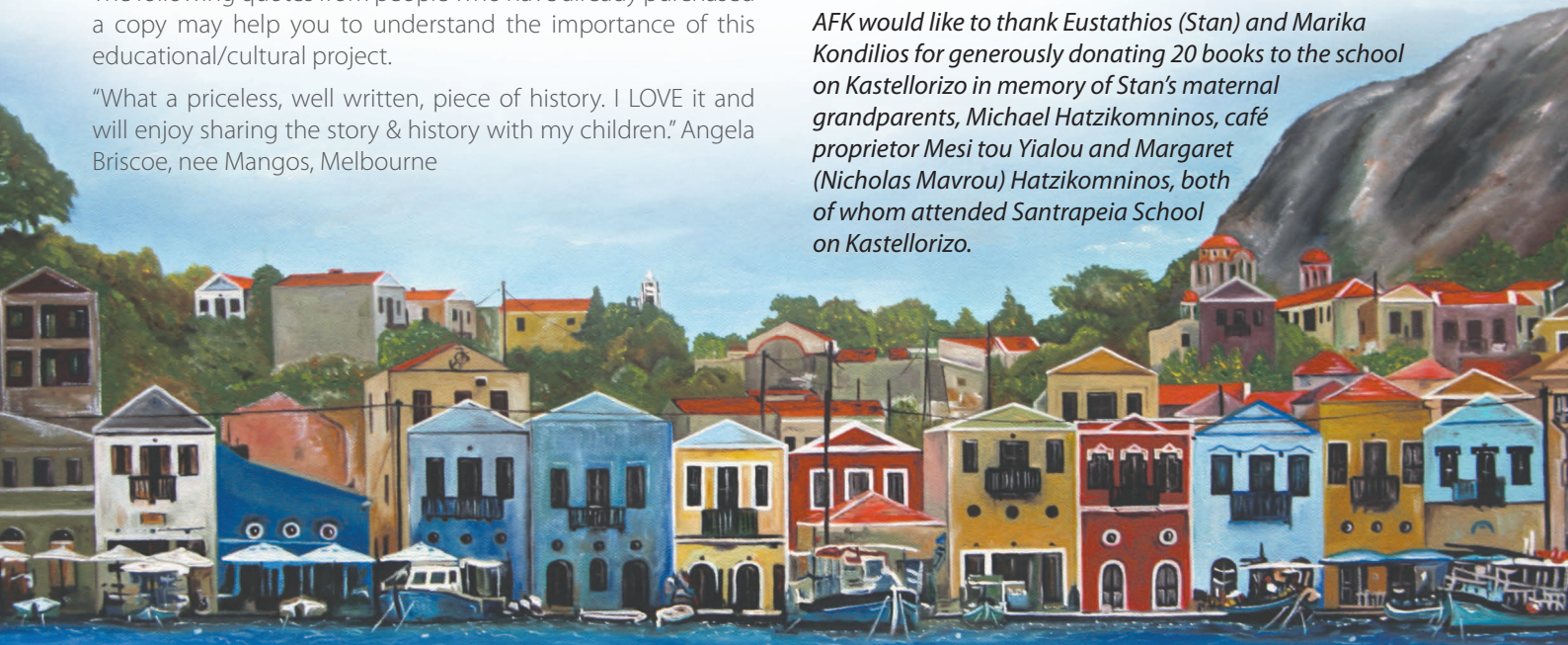
"What a priceless, well written, piece of history. I LOVE it and will enjoy sharing the story & history with my children." Angela Briscoe, nee Mangos, Melbourne

"My nephew loved the book and has been asking Pappou questions ever since." Evelyn Salvaris, Melbourne

"I was mesmerized from the first page and as I got further into the book, I had tears streaming down my face....for the times they were attacked, for the courage the people showed, for the strength of the women. ...The concept of people leaving and returning to this great Island permeates throughout the book and is still true of us all today. I have heard many of the stories from my γιαγιά. ...it is beautifully written, an emotional story, told with heart. Congratulations! Our heritage is very important to all of us. We all have this amazing affinity with Kastellorizo and I believe, every household should have a copy." Michelle Psaltis, Perth

All proceeds raised from the sale of the book will go towards cultural and educational programs. If you would like to read more about the aims and vision of AFK, please check the following website www.kastellorizo.com for more information or contact the coordinator@kastellorizo.com

AFK would like to thank Eustathios (Stan) and Marika Kondilios for generously donating 20 books to the school on Kastellorizo in memory of Stan's maternal grandparents, Michael Hatzikomninos, café proprietor Mesi tou Yialou and Margaret (Nicholas Mavrou) Hatzikomninos, both of whom attended Santrapeia School on Kastellorizo.



Student Exchange 2011

Included in this edition of Filia is an Application Form for AFK's Student Exchange Program which has been hugely successful to date. AFK is selecting 2 students from Australia for cultural exchange during the October 2011 school holidays. If your child, grandchild or other relative fits the criteria outlined on the application form then you may like to submit your application to the AFK coordinator for consideration.

AFK eNews - Monthly Updates by Email

Do we have your email address ? AFK distributes each month an email update with all the news from & about Kastellorizo. We have over 650 subscribers to AFK eNews and it is simple to be included. Simply send an email to coordinator@kastellorizo.com and we will ensure you receive the monthly updates.

AFK Webpage

AFK is constantly updating its webpage so make sure you visit to see what's new: www.kastellorizo.com. The "Customs" page and links to videos of Kastellorizian songs and dances are very popular.

Proverbs by Dr Paul Boyatzis

Skepsou arga m'apofasize sindomos

(Think slowly but come to a decision to act quickly)

Take your time in making up your mind, but once you decide don't procrastinate, act swiftly.

Stou koufou tin porta oson thelis vronda

(You can knock on a deaf person's door as much as you like....he won't respond).

If a person refuses to listen, it's useless pursuing ... you are wasting your time.

Kastellorizian Lexicon

The Kastellorizian word appears in bold with the demotic Greek word in brackets.

afilakas	sakka scoliou	school bag
vazania	melitzanes	eggplants
votros	votiron	butter
voutto	kolimbo	to swim
yianda	yiati	why
endane	ti ine	what is it
xialos	yiaourti	yogurt
yiouraha	koroidia	ridicule
yienia	signia	related (to a person)
katodi	ipogion	cellar
mani -mani	grigora	quickly
xodi	kidia	funeral

Proverbs by Dr George Stabelos

"Me to syggeni, faye, pyes, ala taliverisi min kanis"

With your relative, eat drink and be merry, however avoid conducting business, as if it goes wrong, you stand to lose the business and your relative (I am led to believe that "taliverisi" is a word of Turkish origin meaning to conduct "trade or business")

"Mikro, mikro to aloni sou, ala na einai monahiko sou"

More advice regarding the potential perils of partnerships, advising instead to go it alone on a smaller scale. An aloni was a stone mill where a horse dragged a large stone around in a circle over harvested wheat in order to crush wheat into flour.

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