

The Return of the Native

by Christina Doratis



Christina Doratis grew up in Sydney in the 1960's, the daughter of a Cypriot father and Kastellorizian mother. She attended Sydney Girls High school and Sydney University before setting off on a decade of travel. Christina has lived in Queensland for almost forty years where she has worked as a teacher and a counsellor. Her sister, Zeny Giles, has had a long career as a writer of stories about the Greek migrant experience.

A middle-aged woman had stopped me in the middle of the square and was talking to me from the driver's seat of her little red car.

Ise apou tho?

We'd been on the island for five days, but I hadn't seen her before. Why was she asking me where I was from?

Yenithika stin Avstralia.

Ne, the woman replied sharply, ma – ise apou tho?

She was persisting on asking me the same question? Wasn't it obvious I was a stranger? Or was she asking me about my connection to the island?

O Papous mou itan apou tho – Papacoti.

Eh, the woman replied with a look of knowing on her face. *Ixera. Ise apou tho, do ixera.*

The puzzlement on my face began to fade and I smiled back at her in understanding, Yes – I suppose I am from here.

Fenese upou tho, do prosopo sou, and she pointed at my face to prove her point. I couldn't help thinking she was going a bit far; I looked more like my Cypriot father than my Kastellorizian-born mother.

The woman nodded at Paul and wished me well, then drove off exultantly.

What was all that about? Paul asked.

I'm one of them! I told him; we continued on our walk, my head held high.

I had been to Kastellorizo once before, in the 1960's, a fresh-faced girl setting out to discover the world. Greek sea voyages were not pleasant in those days; the boats were old and slow, crowded and unreliable; they smelt of oil and vomit and arrived in port in the middle of the night; the seas were often rough and turbulent. In the summer of 1967 I had waited 24 hours on a wharf in Rhodes for the ferry to take me to Kastellorizo. I returned a week later on a small fishing boat that smelt of diesel and the briny sea. We rocked and rolled across the passage from Cassie to Rhodes; I was sick the whole way.

It is almost fifty years later and one by one, members of my extended family have been returning to Kastellorizo; now it's my turn. I finally decide to take the ferry to Kastellorizo rather than fly from Rhodes; it seems a more glorious way to enter the port. My daughter had told me of her elation a few years earlier on sailing into Kastellorizo's beautiful u-shaped harbour; her stories of island life had helped inspire my return.

Early morning on the island. It is both a relief and a pleasure to be here amongst these beautiful and peaceful surroundings, before the Easter celebrations. Here on our verandah, the first rays of the sun appear from behind the mountains of Southern Turkey. Kas is visible across the water, a kind of amphitheatre built into the hillside. The rocky islet of Sporadia is in the immediate foreground, covered with red flowering bushes, a few tumble-down buildings still standing while behind it two mountainous arcs lounge seductively into the sea.



It is good to be away from the *limani*, only a ten minute walk to town along the narrow pathway where flowers burst out of the earth and from the jagged faces of the limestone cliffs. Spring on Castellorizo is beautiful; warm days with cool breezes that kick out of nowhere, every pathway covered in flowering plants, bougainvillea billowing over fences, young figs giving off their sweet perfume, bunches of shiny loquats yellowing on trees, juicy white mulberries ripening and gnarled grape vines bursting with soft green leaves.

Last night we shared a plate of *dolmades* – not as good as my mother's, too little meat and not as buttery, but still moist and delicate. With them we had a pea and potato dish cooked in the oven with lemon. Everywhere preparations for Easter are being made. Everything that can be painted is being painted; new shops are being fitted out to take advantage of the crowds who will arrive by boat on *Megali Paraskevi*. But for now there are few tourists on the island.

Today it has blown all day; a wind from the south, whipping the waves and shaking the shutters. Despite feeling tired I walked into town to post our letters and cards, but the Post Office was closed, a notice on the door saying 'open at 12.30'. On my way home I buy some post-cards at a little shop next to the main stairway. Mr P Efsthia, a keen photographer, proudly points to his name at the bottom of the postcards, photos of the island's history. I buy two of them, images of the town after the earthquake of 1926 and the fire of 1944. Poor ravaged Castellorizo.

The Castellorizo I knew almost fifty years ago was a broken-down kind of place with a broken-down community. Around the harbour the hillsides were strewn with the ruins of houses, balconies dangling and interiors exposed, timber and plaster lying about in

messy piles. There was one small shop that sold *baximathia* and tins of spam, a few restaurants on the harbour's edge and the occasional room for rent. The hotel was under construction, driven by a group of keen expatriates, including my Uncle Vassilis.

Castellorizo was sad and colourless then, unlike the 'thriving' township that I see before me on my second visit. The houses on the *limani* are painted in bright colours, electricity is generated from the island's own plant, there is running water from the island's huge storage tanks, a decent road carries cars from the port to Mandraki and the old track to Paleocastro is now the island's major road to the tiny airfield. Modern ferries bring people from Athens twice a week and the plane flies to and from Rhodes on a daily basis in the summer season. There is a bakery that sells fresh bread and sweets. The supermarket has everything you need to self cater, milk and meat and fruit and vegetables, all brought in from Kas or Rhodes.

We think we have the perfect spot on Castellorizo, but the wind is proving to be a tough companion. Last night ferocious howling kept us awake. It is the south wind that Seferis wrote about, a wind that 'hones a razor against our nerves.' In the morning the wind abates, but it has kicked up again and has us indoors.

Each day our hostess brings us fresh treats from her kitchen; *taramosalata*, creamy and salty and pale pink in colour, *dolmades* another day with leaves from her mother's garden on Rhodes (*dolmades* seem to be one of the island's popular fasting foods). Then a plate of her wonderful *koulourakia* made on her last visit to the village; they are excellent, short and crispy and aromatic, made from oil, butter, brandy, flour, rose water - no eggs, she tells me, except for glazing, unlike the *koulouria* we make at home covered in sesame seeds.



The wind was not a problem on our walk to Paleocastro. We left our apartment at 6.30am and were back at the village four hours later. We returned by St George of the Mountain, along the wide road that navigates the rocky terrain at the top of the island, passing by the highest peak of Vigla, where the military have a post. The road is dotted with stone huts and look-outs; this little island is stippled by war, centuries of battles and possession and keeping 'the enemy' at bay. The sound of brass bells rings out as the goats scatter across the fields one after the other.

We stop at St George of the Mountain for morning tea but are disappointed to find the doors locked. The monastery is at the head of the valley where we had walked a few evenings before, reaching the plateau via the huge zig-zag stairway behind the village. It was beautiful in the evening light as we walked the stony pathway with spiky bushes underfoot, wild oregano and sage and sweet-smelling thyme lining the path. Everywhere we walk across the top of the island I search for stone *patitiria*, grape and olive presses carved into rock platforms. But I can't find a single one.

It is Good Friday and tonight we will witness the *epitaphion* procession. During the day the bells of the church ring out on the hour and the flags are at half mast.

*Bells like coins falling sound today all over the city
Between each peal a new space opens
Like a drop of water on the earth: the moment has come,
Raise me up.*

-Seferis

Here on our tiny promontory, life is quiet and secluded. We rest in the hot morning sun, listening to the waves gently lapping. We are on our deck when the boat from Athens arrives. The Diagoras enters the port, drops its anchor, spreading its huge frame across the harbour and sits humming ruthlessly. We have dinner at Alexandra's that night and afterwards a walk around the harbour. We look back at the town lit up with festive lights, the Diagoras' mournful sound reverberating through the harbour. An endless stream of people walk past, well-dressed Athenians here for Easter; everyone is waiting to join the procession.

At 9pm the bells begin to ring out. The congregation has assembled in the mosaic courtyard, families and young men, elderly couples and well-dressed children, young women with long curly manes,

short skirts and unwieldy high heels, men quietly smoking, all waiting for the procession to begin. And when the *epitaphion* finally appears, lit up in fairy lights, you can no longer make out the careful arrangement of flowers.

The military leads the way and young altar boys holding huge candles, the voice of the priest lost in the night air. The procession takes off into the street and down the curving roadway to the waterfront, passing houses where families wait with oil lamps and holy water to sprinkle over passers by. People are casually reverent as they walk slowly down to the harbour; and we are with them.

The next morning is Easter Saturday. The *limani* is alive with people; shops have opened selling tourist kitsch, olive oil products, soaps and sweets from Rhodes; harbour-front cafes are filled with people sitting over glasses of wine and cups of coffee; children are fishing in the harbour; the restaurant staff are preparing for lunch while men in aprons clean huge fish in laneways beside the waterfront. The whole place is busy, noisy and crowded, as we have not seen it before. A few days of commerce, then it will slow down again and we will be gone.

I have had Easters on other Greek islands – a long time ago – rituals conducted with an excitement and thoroughness that involves the whole town. I have seen carcasses of lambs being prepared for the Easter feast, men slaughtering them, stripping them down to their shiny skins, slitting them open to extract the gizzards and organs, cleaning them up and leaving them to hang. Women carry the steaming entrails into their houses in enamel dishes to start preparing the *mayeritza* that will be eaten after the midnight service.

How would it have been for Paul and me to have shared Easter Sunday with our hosts and their friends and family? It seemed wrong to be leaving on such a special day. I stand outside the airport terminal listening for the drone of the engines that will announce the plane's arrival; the runway is an ugly slash in the landscape. The plane is on time. We take off and float above the rock-strewn sea, clutching our cellophane wrapped *tsoureki*. It is hard to believe that our time on Castellorizo has been real - the photo on my wall at home, the stories and memories I have gathered over the years, my family's history - all experienced in a kind of dream state.

OUR JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA

by Alexandros Ntervisi, Pantelis Amygdalos & Despoina Papoutsi



Our experiences in Australia are ones that we will never forget. We really appreciated the opportunities that we were offered and we thank everyone involved. We would like to give you a snapshot of our travels, the people we met and the sights we saw.

We began our journey on the 20th July 2016 when we left Kastellorizo to start our adventure. We felt excited with a touch of nervousness as we were venturing to a country that we had heard so much about. We were also keen to meet up with our Australian friends who we had met on Kastellorizo.

We arrived in Australia on the 22nd July. Our first city was Perth. The Mayor of Perth, Ms Lisa Scaffidi welcomed us and spoke to us about her city. Our host families were extremely hospitable and we felt comfortable living with them. During our stay in Perth, we visited many sights and some highlights were the Aquarium, Perth Modern School, The Bell Tower and Elizabeth Quay. We were also able to catch up with friends we made on Kastellorizo, and we had a wonderful time together. Perth is a beautiful city that we were lucky enough to have visited.

Our next stop was Melbourne. Again, our host families were so welcoming and organised us to visit many of the sights of Melbourne. We were lucky enough to go to an Australian Rules football match and even though we didn't know the rules, it was so much fun. We also visited the Melbourne Zoo, went rock climbing, saw a movie at iMax, visited The Shrine of Remembrance and finally

went to Oakleigh which was like being back in Greece. Melbourne was great and we would all like to go back there one day.

Canberra, the capital of Australia was the next city we visited. Even though we only stayed in Canberra for three days, we did manage to go to the snow and we all tried snowboarding. We also visited the War Memorial and Questacon which is The National Science and Technology Centre. Our host families also took us to a Soccer match. The game was exciting and so much fun mainly because this time we knew the rules. Canberra is an interesting city being the centre of political life in Australia.

The final city of our journey was Sydney. We were lucky enough to see some of Sydney's amazing sights. The Sydney Opera House was remarkable as was the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Luna Park was so much fun and we were also taken to The Blue Mountains where the views were breathtaking. Sydney is a wonderful city with so much to see and do.

Finally, we would like to first thank Friends of Kastellorizo as without their program our amazing adventure to Australia would not have happened. We would also like to thank our wonderful host families who showed us their generosity, their care and welcomed us all into their homes. Thank you also to the City of Perth, Randwick Council and the Kastellorizian Association of WA and Victoria.

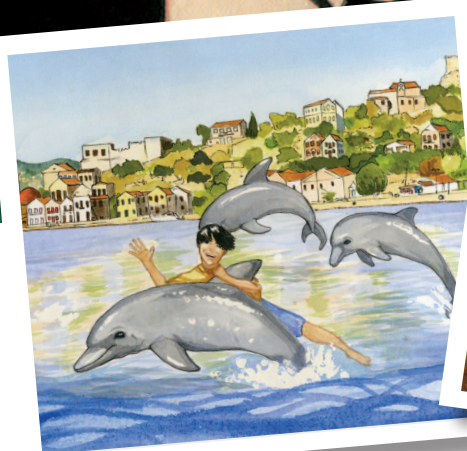
We will never forget our Australian experience.

A large illustration at the top of the page shows Melpomene on the left with long, curly black hair adorned with green leaves and a red lip, and Andonis on the right with short black hair and a yellow shirt. They are both looking towards the viewer.

MELPOMENE AND ANDONIS

Stories of Megisti Kastellorizo

By Michele Kiosoglous
and Philippa Adgemis.
Illustrated by Jamaes Blake



The European launch
7:15pm July 10th. 2017
Kastellorizo. Megisti Kastellorizo
at the Drasi Office and Platia.
Kastellorizo Limanis.
All welcome. Cocktail event

MELPOMENE AND ANDONIS

Stories of Megisti Kastellorizo

By Karene Buchanan (nee Lucas - Daughter of Luke and Despina Lucas)

On Friday 3rd of February I had the pleasure of attending the sold out book launch of the Stories of Megisti Kastellorizo series at Kastellorizian House in South Melbourne.

As I entered the venue, the picture book "Melpomene and Andonis" was immediately brought to life with the gorgeous portrayal and re-creation of the Muse of Tragedy and Song in a stunning, flowing and green Grecian gown. Her long, curly, black hair was adorned with a wreath of ivy and she carried her lyre. Brave and kind young Andonis, with his dolphin, then guided me inside the blue and green lit venue to the recreated world of Megisti, which was enhanced with a slide show of James Blake's stunning images from the picture storybook along with photos taken by the authors. The authors' attention to detail did not end there. The wine served was labelled with an image reminiscent of the front cover, cocktails were coloured green with muse themed titles and they were served with the abundant and delicious finger food. Particular reference should be made to the hand crafted biscuits shaped as dolphins and the boukila (or brooch) from the text that was the symbol of Melpomene's love and sadness within the manuscript and which were gifted to guests on their departure.

Speeches by delegates started off the official launch; Mr. George Papadopoulos introduced the book and the collaborators, but I was touched more by the authors and their interaction with us all. Michele Kiosoglous enlightened us about the island of Megisti and how it was her muse that inspired her to write the books, but more interestingly she shared her purpose in writing these stories. She touched on the message behind the books, which alludes to the muse symbolising our ancestors. She explained, that as Kastellorizians and many others of Greek heritage are now third and fourth generation Australians, we are slowly losing cultural ties and the identity that our parents and grandparents tried

so hard to maintain. A new identity is being forged- a person of mixed heritage and no cultural ties to ancestral lands. It is important, she stated, that we document the stories and the messages for our children, grandchildren and the generations to come so that the folklore is not lost. She explained that the book encourages an authentic literary experience. She revealed that the stories are didactic and are woven with threads of history, geography, myth and folklore. It is her intention that the messages taught and exemplified by our grandparents be handed down.

Listening to Michele, I understood that the more we assimilate into the Australian way of life, the further we shift away from our ancestral heritage and lose our traditions, language and customs. The book series, she said, is a way for us to preserve the love for our Hellenic culture and to share it with our children so they can learn to appreciate their history and ancestry. The series is also for visitors who travel to Greece and want to teach their children about foreign peoples and cultures. Her comments made me eager to go home and read the hardcopy to my sons.

Co-author Philippa Adgemis gave a moving theatrical presentation of a passage of the story. Her re-creation of the characters and their story was engaging but the stunning surprise was her beautiful voice re-creating the song of Melpomene to Andonis. It was another gorgeous detail that transported the audience to the world of Melpomene and Andonis. I knew I had to purchase one of these autographed picture books.

Following the conclusion of the official part of the launch, we had the opportunity to mingle and to have a photo taken with Melpomene and Andonis (and one of the dolphins) as well as meet and greet the authors and illustrator. It was a wonderful surprise to meet so many Hellenes amongst the crowd and speak with bookshop owners too.

I returned to Sydney, to read the book to my seven year old son and share a little bit of my ancestry with him. Blake took to it immediately and when I asked him what he thought he said, "I loved it...I loved how brave the boy was". So not only did I have a memorable and enjoyable experience at the launch, but through the manuscript I was able to teach my son the importance of bravery, courage and love and launch him into the world of Greek mythology and his heritage.



DOCTORS OF THE WORLD

By Michael Printzos, Athens

Michael Printzos is The Hellenic Initiative's (THI's) Director of Programming in Greece. Michael is a Greek national, born and raised, and is deeply passionate about his homeland. He has been with THI since 2013, and manages all of the programs on the ground, keeps track of the metrics and follows up as needed. He also interfaces with all applicants for THI's charitable work. The work is gratifying, but also challenging, as his reflection demonstrates, after a Doctors of the World mission to the little island of Kastellorizo.

Through this partnership, which has been active from 2014 to the present, THI is supporting communities in Athens, Piraeus, Chania, Patras on a regular basis and numerous other cities and smaller villages all around Greece by supporting the organization's mobile units. The total granted to date is US\$480,000.00 and the primary focus has been on supporting their dental and vaccination programs. Greek children cannot register to go to school unless they can prove they have received the minimal vaccinations. These can cost US\$200.00 per child and many families cannot afford them. In 2015, gynecological services were added as part of the services offered to the community. So far almost 10,000 children have been vaccinated against a number of diseases, more than 13,000 individuals have been provided with primary and secondary dental treatments. and a team of gynecologists has provided services to 1,200 women.

I was always good with numbers. I kind of like the way they speak the truth without being susceptible to different interpretations. Being THI's Director of Programming is often a job dealing with a lot of numbers. Wondering how many beneficiaries can be part of one program, and how much value I can get for every dollar invested, are questions that often come to my mind. Avoiding the real hardships that our beneficiaries go through is an advantage of the work I am doing since I have the privilege of dealing with... numbers.

Or so I thought until the day I arrived in Kastellorizo back in March. For those of you who haven't been there, it is one of the most beautiful islands in the Aegean. Its small harbor gives you the impression that it jumped out of a movie set. I did not go for vacation, but to accompany aid workers providing relief to those most in need. I was there with a wonderful team of 10 doctors working together with our partner, Doctors of the World. The whole story started at THI's 2015 Gala when I was approached by someone who asked me to examine the living

conditions on the island, especially after the refugee crisis. I was on the phone during the winter trying to organize this trip and connect with the local doctor to see what he needed most. We arrived together with a mobile unit and for 2 days the people in Kastellorizo had access to health services likely much better than anything they could have found in Athens. We visited the elderly and people who had suffered strokes in the past. We visited homes, saw young families coming with their children to be vaccinated, and even served a number of people with primary and secondary dental treatments. Everything looked fine until that Sunday morning when I woke up to get ready for my flight home to my family in Athens. As I was walking around the harbor, I spotted life vests on the surface of the sea. I approached the local medical unit and heard the screams of a woman. I suddenly realized that something terrible had happened. The previous night, more than fifty people had crossed over from the Turkish shore and landed at the neighboring island of Ro. What I did not realize at this point, was that not all of them made it safe.

Amidst the beauty of that island paradise, whose serenity was shattered by the screams of a bereaved mother, I witnessed the moment when a coast guard officer brought two drowned children in a single body bag to the medical unit. Two innocent souls, a boy and a girl around 3-4 years old, died that night as their mothers lost them at sea. At my back one mother was screaming. The doctors were giving her an injection to calm her down. In front of me the father was smoking a cigarette, staring blankly at the sea, without saying a word or making any sound. Just staring there with his eyes on the horizon wondering....

This is a moment that I will never forget. Not only because of what I witnessed, but because of my proximity to the disaster. This is when I realized, the hard way, that numbers don't speak the truth all the time. That night's TV news reminded me of this when they reported this story as "two children, drowned in the Aegean". Their mention in the news was as short as the lives they lived.

I don't know how much you believe in numbers yourselves, but I do know that I have many to share with you, like the ones you can find by reading THI's Annual Report. But as you read through it, try to grasp what these numbers really mean and feel proud of the help you are providing to the people of Greece!

To become a member, to advertise or for general information contact Marilyn Tsolakis,
FoK Co-ordinator | + 61 423 776 896 | coordinator@kastellorizo.com
www.kastellorizo.com | PO Box 2118 Churchlands, Western Australia 6018.

