



1948 - Kazzie Picnic, Lilydale - L-R: Marika Koutsoukis, Margaret & Melody Hetrelezis, Lily Koutsoukis, Mary Conos

IT COULD HAVE BEEN YOUR YIAYIA

by Florence Livery, Melbourne

This edition coincides with International Women's Day that is celebrated annually on 8 March. To acknowledge this occasion, Florence Livery from Melbourne has written our lead article that explores the resilience and strength of women who left Greece at the beginning of the 20th Century and adapted as migrant women into an often unwelcoming Australian environment that was shaped by the White Australia Immigration Policy. Her story is one story of our pioneering women who were heroic in their everyday pursuits of forging a better life for their families and the sacrifices they made at their own personal cost. What makes women's stories different to men's is that they had less control over their lives, because of the patriarchal structure that had to be adhered to.



Each year the National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) selects a different theme with which to celebrate their history, culture and achievements during their special week of commemoration. The 2018 NAIDOC theme was **Because of Her, We Can!**¹

This prompted me to question how the Kastellorizian communities around Australia have recognised and celebrated our women and in particular our pioneer women? Those women who in the first half of the 20th century left their homeland for a new land, often without immediate family for support and security, themselves often scarcely into adulthood. Sometimes in an arranged marriage, sometimes newly married or reuniting with a spouse who they had not yet come to know, and if the latter, quite possibly with a toddler in tow. More fortunate ones arrived with a spouse in hand who had returned to Kastellorizo to marry and so could guide them with some, albeit very limited experience in their new land. At other times our women may have received a telegram and associated passage to keep house and labour for their brothers already here, before a marriage was arranged, often waiting for the rest of the family to emigrate. Sometimes they came out as a toddler or a young teenager with their mother reuniting with a father they barely knew. Others may have been born in the new land, with no experience or memory of the homeland, but reminded of it every day.

Women in a foreign land, where in your adopted society the number of boucla you possessed was meaningless. No language, no independence, steered by the Kastellorizian men in a society where even they were not sure of the norms.

There is no way I can put myself in their shoes. Unimaginable. To say it was a culture shock is patronising and does not dignify their experiences. One of my uncles once told me that when he arrived in Port Said in 1918 it was the first time he had ever seen a banana. That would have been frivolous compared to what our women witnessed as they disembarked at the provincial port of Fremantle in Western Australia, small, poor and uninviting² as they walked the cobbled stone paths to their new lodgings.

They were thrown into Australian society sheltered, naïve and oblivious to the issues on the wider political spectrum, often to their detriment. They navigated the country following their menfolk looking for better economic opportunities. Even if they stayed around the big cities, changing house and location was dependent on the locality of the men's itinerant employment and the need to upgrade or downgrade lodgings as new family members arrived or moved on, as part of the chain migration process.

Many of our women joined our men as they traversed the country seeking employment, often doing many more miles than their seafaring ancestors ever did.³ From the forests south of Perth to Port Darwin to work on the Vestey meatworks or the Pine Creek railway, across to the North Queensland cane fields, back to the Top End, down along the coast establishing cafes or labouring at Wyndham, Broome and Geraldton, through to the kitchens and cafes of Perth and Fremantle, maybe across to the Kalgoorlie goldfields or more likely Hannan and Forrest Streets, further across to Port Pirie to the BHP Smelter and by the 1920s the cities on the eastern seaboard. Sometimes they would make semi-permanent stopovers in major towns, setting up house and shop. At other times they would return to the base of a major city when the work dried up.

After World War I, many of our newly arrived women began to by-pass Fremantle, their first port of call often being Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane to reunite with family who had now established shops in major cities and towns across the new land. Although nowhere near the size they are today, these relative cosmopolitan centres may have reminded them of the once bustling Kastellorizian limani.

It is very difficult to find primary evidence about our pioneer Kastellorizian women. All officialdom, as was the norm, was done through the men, and women only appeared as an annotation, such as in naturalisation applications and Alien registrations. Lodgings as listed in official post office records were registered in the men's names although it was the women who kept the home fires burning whilst the men visited the kafenia for relaxation. When the Kastellorizian Brotherhoods were gradually established across Australia from 1912 onwards, only men were admitted as members. It was not until 1974 that the Victorian brotherhood admitted Anne Salvaris as its first female member. In Victoria, there are no archives to prove their achievements until 1961 when the trailblazing Kastellorizian Ladies' Society was formed, unique in the Greek Community of Melbourne, the only truly independent ladies' society. All others were affiliated with churches or brotherhoods as a sub-committee.

They may not have publicly marched, protested or spoken at demonstrations and gatherings⁴ but privately within their community our Kastellorizian female pioneers provided stability. Once they were here they never deserted their families. They were in it for the long haul and realised that returning to Kastellorizo was not an option. Our women remained defiant and strong, trying to finely balance that survival need to assimilate whilst maintaining their songs, music, dialect, costumes, cuisine, customs, myths and legends. They too had their dreaming stories. Maybe the next generation did not appreciate this at the time, maybe not even the third generation, but by holding on very loosely to those thin strands of their homeland, they have enriched the lives of the subsequent generations now living in the 21st century.

Sadly, the role of Kastellorizian women in our social and political survival has often been invisible, unsung or diminished.⁵ Before we make amends we need to take a walk in their shoes and maybe go back in time. Their lives, achievements, voices and unwavering passions have given us strength, empowered past generations and paved the way for generations to come.⁶





1923 - Florou & Michael Church wedding



1940s - 319 Lygon st Fruit shop - Florou, Theo & Uncle John

They are our elders, our grandmothers, our aunties, our mothers, our sisters and our daughters.⁷

Because of Her, We Can! ⁸

Let me now introduce you to my own Yiayia, my maternal grandmother Florou Conos (nee Augustes). Her story is one representation of the hardship our women faced as they tried to adapt to a new cultural context that was not always inviting and welcoming of 'others.' It could have been your Yiayia.

Born 1902 in Kastellorizo, Florou was the second oldest of eight children born to Evangelos and Krystalla Augustes, the oldest girl, six younger siblings and needless to say, an adult well before her time. Evangelos was a cobbler. He died in 1917, possibly through complications following the Spanish flu epidemic which struck the island. At the time of his death his youngest child was two years old. As this story will show, all remaining members of this family settled in Melbourne.

The two older boys departed Kastellorizo earlier than the others. In 1917, Emmanuel, aged 17, the oldest and now the breadwinner, came to Australia via Marseilles, in the company of other Kastellorizian young men around his age. A year later, in 1918 his 11-year-old brother Peter farewelled his family as he chaperoned his maternal aunt, Despina Scorde and her 18-month-old daughter to Australia to be reunited with her husband. Like many compatriots, Emmanuel Scorde returned to Kastellorizo to marry, stayed a while, returned to Australia without his growing family, only to send money home for them to emigrate at a later date.

Peter was literally dropped off at Fremantle as Theia Despina joined her husband in Port Pirie. Brother Emmanuel was working back and forth between the kitchens of the Perth cafes to the southern forests, lumbering in the bush or labouring at the saw mills. Peter stayed with relatives in Perth, assisting them to hawk their fruit or fish. Emmanuel, a young lad in a foreign land with minimal English and no parenting skills, trying to survive and send remittances home, was now burdened with the responsibility of his younger brother. He forbade Peter to attend school much against the latter's will. Money was more important than an education.

As work was drying up, the boys, again with other Kastellorizians took the coastal steamer to Port Pirie. Whilst Emmanuel and the older men laboured at the BHP Smelter, Peter worked in the kitchens of the local Greek cafes, hidden from the authorities. The Great BHP Strike of 1919 was the catalyst for heading east to Melbourne.

In time, after labouring in the kitchens and cafes of Melbourne, predominantly those owned by the Ithacans, in 1920 Emmanuel

bought his first fruit shop at 399 Bay Street, Port Melbourne. His relationship with his younger brother was fraught and Emmanuel needed reliable assistance, those who would work for him for nothing without question. Emmanuel also needed a housekeeper. He sent for his sisters.

By this time the rest of the Augustes family were in Port Said quite possibly waiting for passage to Australia. They had been there 18 months when in 1921 Florou and her 12-year-old sister Mihalakina came out to Australia unchaperoned. Even though Florou was 19 at the time, she did not miss the irony of the situation, 'All that time I was not allowed out by myself in Port Said, but they let me go half way across the world unaccompanied and be responsible for my younger sister.'⁹

On 5 September 1921, Florou and Mihalakina disembarked SS Carignano and waited and waited at Station Pier for Emmanuel to appear, as supposedly arranged by telegram. As the terminus became deserted and night fell, alone in a foreign land, Florou left Mihalakina minding the baoulo and ventured down to the local town. She finally recognised some Greek writing on a shop window and sought assistance. When she eventually found her brother he simply said he did not get the telegram.

This was the start of a torrid sibling relationship. The sisters resided and worked at Emmanuel's Bay Street shops, now numbering two. Mihalakina, now 13, had her age put up to 14 and was threatened not to tell the authorities her true age. House work, shop work and bullying were the order of the day. The girls only had each other. It was heart-breaking for Florou when Mihalakina was loaned out to another Kastellorizian family as a domestic for nearly a year. At least the woman was Australian, and Mihalakina's English was much improved. As for Florou, minimal English, hard labour and isolated with no female companions, she never forgave her brother for this introduction to her adopted land.

As time went by and his empire expanded, Emmanuel with his relative wealth and associated social standing within the fledgling Kastellorizian community of Melbourne, felt it was time to get married. To do so he first needed to marry Florou off. Of course, she had no say in it. Florou was betrothed to a local Kastellorizian. He had even bought the ring. After some weeks however, she courageously called it off, seemingly indifferent as to Emmanuel's reaction. Maybe she figured another reprimand from her brother was easier to take than a lifetime with someone with whom she 'knew it did not feel right.' By default, Emmanuel agreed, as his cousin, Spiros Fermanis said he had someone 'better' coming over from Perth. Again, Florou had no say in it.



1960s - Florou & grand-daughters

1949 - Kazzie Picnic Werribee- L-R: Mary Conos, Stella & Maisie Jackomos.

After almost ten years in Western Australia, Michael Economides (in Melbourne known as Conos) arrived in Melbourne in mid-October 1922 and a week later, in a civil service, married Florou Augustes. On 5 January 1923 they were the second Kastellorizian couple to be married at Evangelismos Church. Married life however, did not really change things for Florou. She was still cleaning, cooking and working for Emmanuel. At least Emmanuel paid Michael for his labour.

On 26 December 1922, just one week before the church wedding, Florou's mother Krystalla and her remaining four siblings, Asimina, Zambetta, Michael and Theodore aged between eighteen and four, arrived in Melbourne. Mihalakina was soon to return from external domestic duties. The Augustes family spread themselves between Emmanuel's Bay Street shops and Florou's domestic workload quadrupled overnight. Emmanuel postponed his own marriage plans. He had already promised Asimina to Andrew Jackomos and by April they were married. One less mouth to feed.

This lasted 13 months before Florou and Michael saved enough money and moved to North Carlton, hoping at last for some breathing space, away from the clutter, noise and family arguments, a chance to re-start married life on their own. They bought a fruit shop at 777 Nicholson Street, North Carlton from where they had two children, Mary born in 1924 and Theo in 1926. The business offered some security and social life amidst a growing Greek community. Very soon the extended Augustes family, (except Emmanuel) followed them to North Carlton, all living above the fruit shop Peter had bought, just nine doors away. Where one went, others soon followed.

In late 1930, after nearly seven years, the Conos fruit shop went broke. The street could not sustain two fruit shops in the climate of the Great Depression. It was not helped by the fact that brother Peter would send their mother up to the Conos shop to register their prices and so continually undercut them. Poor Florou struggled with her family loyalties.

The next two years were a battle for Florou, constantly moving house for a range of reasons – a nephew coming over from Perth to study medicine, (of course it was assumed Florou would make room and support him and of course he needed his own bedroom); more family coming over from Perth to join in the glory of having a doctor in the family; hastily evacuating another house on discovering the previous occupants had diphtheria; the Omonia Café going broke after Michael was pimped on by a competitor, Florou being left with a table, two chairs and mattresses as they searched for cheaper accommodation.

In 1933, luck finally came their way and George Karpouzis sold his 319 Lygon Street fruit shop to Florou and Michael for £300 with a £50 deposit. It even had a telephone and an internal bathroom with a gas

heater. This was the start of a new era for the Conos family, Florou, Michael, Mary and Theo. This was the start of nearly 25 years stability, based around the fruit shop and a small Greek community in Carlton.

It may have been the Depression years economically, but the emotional advantages spoke for themselves. Imagine a good half of a large brood of maternal and paternal cousins living close by, within a block of the fruit shop and the other half, a short cable tram ride way. What a wonderful community they were a part of in those years. Males and females of all ages just around every corner, a social life for all members of the Conos family regardless of age or gender. For Florou, some became confidantes, others enhanced her domestic skills, some mentored her; she mentored others. They were all a natural part of her life with whom she came into constant contact with.

This came to an unfortunate end in 1944, when Michael Conos died and Florou, aged 42, began to wear black for the next 25 years. Michael had been ill and weakened for several years and young Theo had been doing the markets since the age of 15, driving illegally and walking the dark Carlton streets at 1.00 am each morning to fetch the vehicle garaged some distance away. The next generation was repeating itself, another teenager forced to become an adult before their time. Survival for an income was imperative so the three of them persevered, worked hard and long hours in keeping the shop going. At the same time Florou insisted Mary and Theo keep up their studies, Mary at Emily MacPherson College of Domestic Economy and Theo at the Working Men's College (now RMIT University) studying architecture. It all soon became too much. They both quit their studies and Florou cried in shame as the supposed better life she was trying to make for her children was falling apart.

There was absolutely no thought of Florou re-marrying. Whilst working at the fruit shop she was criticised one day for not wearing stockings. 'What are you trying to do, attract another man?' – a vicious comment from a Greek customer haunted her for years. Some years later, when Mary married, she struggled to get her mother out of black. Eventually, Florou relented and settled for navy blue (but only for a day)!

Although Florou loved her children, her life was now totally in their hands. Their incomes were entwined, their accommodation was entwined. No government support in those days. She was the backbone of the family and business, but felt it was her duty to relinquish all control to the Greek son, as was the custom. When the children married, sold the shop and moved to the aspirational eastern suburbs so did Florou. Mainly living with her daughter, but at times between son and daughter, again Florou became the house-keeper and the baby-sitter, whilst the next generation strove to succeed.



Kazzie picnic at Warrandyte, Melbourne

One of the first of the extended family to head east, although she had no say in it, Florou saw the move to the growing eastern suburbs as part of the second generation's climb up the social hierarchy. It may not have been Kew or Balwyn but it was east, away from the high-rise Housing Commission now taking over Carlton and away from the influx of post-World War 2 migrants. Having a belief is one thing, however experiencing it is another. The eastern suburbs were confronting for Florou. A feeling of alienation re-emerged, this time as she left her Carlton community.

The Conos / Livery family were initially the only family of Greek heritage in Blackburn North. Florou was starting to relive those early days of Port Melbourne and Carlton, as she witnessed the local customers at the family's fruit and delicatessen shops throw fruit, eggs, whatever they could get their hands on, shouting those expletives about foreigners which we all would have heard from our forebears, maybe as an excuse when not satisfied with the product or price or maybe just the White Australia Policy in full swing.

The isolation was also starting to repeat itself. Now it was not just Mihalakina. The security and comfort of Florou's extended family was now beyond reach and independence. At least there was a telephone. The day George and Voula with their elderly mother moved into the area was a day of celebration for all. Well away from Evangelismos, Florou persistently made the four-hour return trip by bus and tram where she thrived in the sanctuary of the church, allowing her to meditate and take her thoughts to another level.

As time went by, the aspirational extended family also moved east, public transport improved and Florou re-established her independence in maintaining contact with her family. Time and distance were no longer an issue. Her English however, never really improved. She improvised with many words in translation and just added an 'ou' at the end to make it sound more Greek (such as television-ou). The post-World War 2 Greeks had trouble understanding her Greek and the locals had trouble understanding her English. At times it was like she was in No-Man's Land.

In the late 1960s Florou witnessed her grandchildren grow up and as she moved to Box Hill with daughter Mary she found a spring in her step. This time being part of the embryonic community of the Holy Cross Greek Church, now only a short bus-ride away.

Florou struggled with the 1970s, witnessing the social changes of the times much to her horror and disbelief. These were trying times for her as she was presented with the divorce of her son, a concept so foreign to someone who had never put herself first. Her grand-daughters were blossoming into young adults and the freedom allowed by their parents did not always sit comfortably with Florou. Frequently she blurred the lines between parent and grandparent causing angst and resentment within the three generations living under one roof.

In 1974, finally out of black and emerging in different shades of blue and grey, Florou returned to Kastellorizo, the pre-tourist, destitute Kastellorizo of nearly 50 years ago. It was an ominous voyage from

Rhodes as everyone on board was seasick. As Florou disembarked she was faced with a deserted and wintry pre-season Kastellorizo. The only available pensione, with no windows and only shutters, could not block out the wind, rain, cold and stench of the leaking sewerage. Florou caught the flu. Her family home was demolished and there was scant evidence of her young life. It was not the island she had left. She hated being there and left feeling she belonged nowhere.

Florou's life had recurring themes – struggle, isolation, alienation and patriarchal control.

Was she ever happy I ask you?

I do not think she ever asked or expected to be happy. Her happiness was your happiness. As long as her descendants' lives were better than hers, that is all she asked for.

It could have been your Yiayia.

Endnotes:

¹<http://naidoc.org.au>

²John N Yiannakis, Megisti in the Antipodes, Hesperian Press 1996, page 21

³John N Yiannakis, Megisti in the Antipodes, Hesperian Press 1996, page 144

⁴<http://naidoc.org.au>

⁵<http://naidoc.org.au>

⁶<http://naidoc.org.au>

⁷<http://naidoc.org.au>

⁸<http://naidoc.org.au>

⁹Mary Livery, personal interview, 2011.

kailis hospitality group.

ISLAND MARKET

364 West Coast Drive, Trigg WA 6029
islandmarket@kailis.com | islandmarkettrigg.com
[@islandmarket_trigg](https://www.instagram.com/islandmarket_trigg) [/islandmarkettrigg](https://www.facebook.com/islandmarkettrigg)
 P (08) 9447 0077

Kailis FISH MARKET CAFE

46 Mews Road, Fremantle WA 6959
fremantle@kailis.com | www.kailis.com
[@kailisfremantle](https://www.instagram.com/kailisfremantle) [/KailisFishMarketCafe](https://www.facebook.com/KailisFishMarketCafe)
 P (08) 9335 7755

CANTEEN FOOD + ESPRESSO

364 West Coast Drive, Trigg WA 6029
canteentrigg@kailis.com | www.canteentrigg.com
[@canteentrigg](https://www.instagram.com/canteentrigg) [/canteentrigg](https://www.facebook.com/canteentrigg)
 P (08) 9447 0077

THE SHOREHOUSE

278 Marine Parade, Swanbourne WA 6010
info@shorehouse.com.au | www.shorehouse.com.au
[@theshorehouse](https://www.instagram.com/theshorehouse) [/theshorehousewa](https://www.facebook.com/theshorehousewa)
 P (08) 9286 4050

proudly sponsored by the Victor George Kailis Family

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.



ELMA BATEN INTERVIEW

by Theona Mitaros, Perth

This interview had its origins in the Summer of 2018, when four Perth millennials, Tess, Bronte and Niko Jacquard [Byron and Val Kakulas' grand daughters] and Mona Foroughi, raised 320 Euro for the benefit of cats on Kastellorizo.

They baked chocolate chip biscuits, then walked through the downtown restaurant district and sold their wares over one hour. The power of the Cookie!!

In truth though this inspiring story of love and care of all animals on Kastellorizo began a few years ago by some dedicated locals.

Elma Baten is a well known local who has baked, juiced, chatted and delighted customers with her husband Vangelis for years. They have also been involved in serious issues that Kastellorizo is confronted by, namely Recycling, keeping Kastellorizo clean, on land and sea and caring and protecting all animals on the island.

This is our chat.

TM: Is your jar the only donation jar on the island that you know of?

Elma: Yes, it's been there since the Jacquard sisters' cousins in 2010, donated some euros for the cats and that's how it started. We have probably raised about 7500 Euro over that time.

TM: Do you have any other type of donations?

Elma: Yes we have one couple that came here on a yacht from Turin and donated cat food. One year they bought all the tins of cat food from both supermarkets... about 200 tins.

TM: Do people ask you about the jar?

Elma: We decided to put a note on the jar so that people realise it is not cat food that we buy but are involved in neutering programs.

TM: What do you use the funds for?

Elma: Mainly medicines for the animals like antibiotics and pain killers which the vet, Dr Peter Brown, must purchase and bring to the island. Peter donates all his time. He has trained his wife to be a vet nurse to keep costs down.

Peter is based in the UK, yet is on the Board of the Greek Cat Welfare Society. The first two times he came with 'Nine Lives' a Greek cat organisation. In 2012 he decided to go independent. He travels from the UK twice a year and pays for one half of his trip [because he fell in love with Kastellorizo] and the other half is paid for by The Greek Cats Welfare Society based in the UK but they work mainly on the Greek islands. They send us cages, traps and surgical instruments. They are people who love Greece and Greek cats.

Peter also goes to Ithaca. Damien Mavrothalasitis also very kindly donates a room for Peter and his wife. Arki Kavvidas from the supermarket gives us discounts on the cat food.

TM: Over the years has the money you have raised been used for other activities?

Elma: Yes it's changed a bit. We used to use it only for the neutering when Peter came. But we also use the funds to send any cats to Rhodes that need serious medical attention. We have also used the funds for the police dog that had a cancerous lump on its belly. It was a successful operation and we were all very happy with the result.

TM: How often does Dr Brown come to Kastellorizo?

Elma: Peter comes twice a year. In 3 days he sees up to 60 cats and between 2- 15 dogs. We only work for three days because the cats realise that we are trying to catch them and it becomes too hard to chase them... and that is true.

TM: When the vet comes what is the program?

Elma: When the vet comes we do two days for the cats and one day for the dogs. The first time this happened we gave them free flea treatments and worm pills just to get owners coming. We encourage them to look after the animals and treat them well. We also set up a tent which is used as a clinic. It was made possible by gifts from Australian couples Pamela and Gareth Karran, Judy and Jack Condous and Ine Marie van de Veerdonk and Fons Brothers.

TM: Have you noticed an improvement?

Elma: I'm happy to say there has been a good improvement. Very few dogs are kept on chains. Owners are now quite happy to pay for treatments.

TM: How do you round up the cats?

Elma: We literally have to chase them.

TM: How do you know which cats to chase?

Elma: A tiny tip of the ear is removed during the procedure... very simple and very effective and helps us to identify which cats need neutering in the future.

TM: Are you the first to have such programs?

Elma: No, in 2011 with Loeki Van Der Vossen, Monica Bruggebors and Angeliki Komonoudi we began looking after cats and their welfare.

TM: Has the opinion of the locals towards cats changed?

Elma: Yes... but I still encourage locals to feed the cats so that they are nourished and do not hang around the restaurants. When you feed them from the restaurant table you only reward them for their bad behaviour.

I have learnt that when a cat is nourished a signal is sent to its brain to keep itself clean, rather than its energy going towards survival. When they are full they will chase after rats, mice, scorpions, snakes, grasshoppers and cockroaches... only when they have energy.

It's the chase that counts. It's not the food at the end because they don't really need it. It's in their instinct, it's what they do for fun. They become an excellent hunter.

TM: In the backstreets I have noticed quite a few bowls of cat food. Does this mean the message is being understood?

Elma: Yes, especially animal lovers understand this.

TM: Which are the problem areas regarding the cats?

Elma: The rubbish bins around the Limani, the cisterns.

TM: Do you think there are still hungry cats?

Elma: Yes because there are cats that are territorial and won't let some cats near... so you need different food stations.

TM: Can all homeowners including those that visit annually, play a role?

Elma: Yes... definitely. While you are here place a plate of cat food out.

I always say don't take them into your house but if you want to feed them please do and don't forget the water. Even put cat food near the bins.

TM: Are visitors generous once they hear about the plight of the cats?

Elma: Yes we once had an Italian couple that would walk through the village filling up the food and water for the cats everyday during their holiday.

TM: After speaking with you today I'm surprised how much I could have been doing all these years.

Elma: I know. I didn't do it in the beginning. We came here in 2006 and it began with a cat looking at me through the window. I grew up with dogs... in fact I think my father would turn in his grave.

TM: So how has life improved for cats over the years on Kastellorizo?

Elma: People now say that there are less cats and that the cats that they see, look much better... Another vet came to the island from Germany and he said that this is the first island where the cats really have meat on their bones. They're cleaner, they're fat. They look healthier and their offspring are healthier. I don't see the diseases anymore... the bad eyes or the cat fights, which stop with neutering.

TM: I think because it has been a gradual process, people haven't realised how Kastellorizo has benefitted by the effort of this small team of people. Do you agree?

Elma: Yes. It's something we cannot ever stop. Although one year we stopped because we had to let the population rejuvenate... we don't want the population to die out. Because they serve a purpose... we were too effective.

TM: What do you hope for people to take away from this interview.

Elma: That everyone can help. That you can see in an animal's eyes that they understand love and affection. That it's not just about the food... it's showing kindness to all animals.

"The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated"
Mahatma Gandhi of India