

Spring on Kythera

When I was leaving Kythera last September I never thought that I would be back so soon and yet a snap decision and there I was packing my bags heading back there for Easter with my dad, to surprise my Aunt in Milopotamos. I had spent an Easter in Kythera many years ago but back then I could not get around as there were no automatic cars on the island, so this time would be a very different experience.

We arrived on Kythera on a bleak cold morning, not exactly the picture I had painted in my mind; nevertheless we were greeted by some warm familiar faces waiting for their Athenian relatives who were shocked to see us. Taki the taxi driver was sent to pick us up and just as well because there was no way we were going to fit our entire luggage in the small rent a car I had organised.

At 7.30am on a cold Spring day, the island is quite deserted, but as the taxi made its up the main street of Potamos, a few curious locals peered over to see who was in the taxi. Dad was in front wearing a hat and I hid in the backseat, so we made it through not being recognised. We arrived at our home in Potamos and waited for our rent a car to be delivered, and then off we went to Milopotamos.

We decided to go straight to the Platanos Kafenion as it was 9.30am by this stage. We walked in startling the waiter and my cousin Kaliopi who runs the Kafenion



John Zervos surprising his sister Katina Karydis

and Restaurant. She advised us that by chance today was the day the restaurant was opening for the holiday/summer season and so we made our way into the kitchen where my aunt was cooking. She had her back to us as we walked in and her daughter spoke first, saying "mum I need to tell you something", without looking up she continued cooking and asked her daughter what she wanted, and then my dad spoke and said "Hello sister". She turned around and he went over



and hugged her, she was shaking and crying and was extremely thankful he had made it back to Greece after so many years away.

It was only a matter of time that we were surprising extended family and friends. I left dad in Milopotamos and headed back to Potamos to organise the house and get some groceries with my first stop being the bakery, surprising my friends there. It was a great feeling being back in Potamos, being greeted by the locals, this made me feel like I was home!

By the time I went back to Milopotamos, the sun had come out and it was only then I really noticed what seemed like a yellow carpet spread over the landscape of the island. Driving along I was surrounded by not only the yellow flowers of the "Skina" and "Aspalathri", but also red poppies all along the roadway.

On Good Friday after the mourning "Apokathilosi" service in Milopotamos, which featured the most ornate epitaph I have ever seen, I decided to take a drive around and take photos of other decorated epitaphs close to home. They were beautifully adorned with fresh flowers picked from people's gardens and from the fields. I had been told by a good friend years



ago, if you are ever in Kythera at Easter, you must go to the Epitaph procession in Hora. I rugged up and with two friends braved the cold and headed to the Estavromeno Church in Hora to attend the service.

There was no room in the church. We were shuffled in, lit our candles and then proceeded to “proskinisi” (kiss) the epitaph and the icon of the Mirtidiotissa which had left the monastery on the Sunday of Orthodoxias.

The choir’s voices echoing out over the loudspeakers onto the alleyways surrounding the church, filled with the faithful waiting to accompany the epitaph on its procession around Hora. As the church bell tolled, the procession led by two local men carrying the icon of the Mirtidiotissa appeared from the church followed by the choir, the Mitropoliti, several priests and the Epitaph.



It truly was a magical sight to see the procession making its way through the main street of Hora, passing homes that had opened their doors ways displaying icons and burning candles to light the way for the Epitaph.



As we reached the Platea, we stopped and a pray was read out and then fireworks were let off overhead.

The procession continued all the way to the top end of Hora and then returned making another stop at the Platea, then through the quaint little alleys passing the Mitropoli and up past the little churches of Messa Pourko, with a stunningly lit Kastro overhead.

Finally passing the police station and back down to the Church. The epitaph was then lifted at the entrance of the church and all the faithful passed under it to receive a blessing entering the church and kissing the Icon of the Mirtidiotissa. The epitaph was then placed back

into the church and the service was ended and as we headed back up to our car it began to rain, what perfect timing, call it Devine intervention!

Easter Saturday was a cold wet day, I went to the Anastasi service in Potamos, and then I felt afraid for my life trying to walk home without going deaf or being hit by all the explosions of the crackers being let off all over the village. I opened up my shutters on Easter Sunday and it was a perfectly stunning Spring day. I



headed to my friends home for lamb and kontosouvli on the spit along with a table full of homemade food. What a feast! After lunch we drove down to Agia Pelagia, where there were hundreds of people who were feasting on lambs cooked on the spit on the sands of Agia Pelagia beach. There was music and dancing, it was a great afternoon.

The feast of St George is celebrated in a big way on Kythera. Two days before we headed up to Riza, a tiny



town above Milopotamos with only 1 inhabitant and a church, the town where my father, grandfather and great grandfather had all been born. Stamati opened the doors of his house and invited all of the locals of Milopotamos to attend lunch after the church service, once again there was lamb on the spit red eggs and plenty of wine!

The night before the feast day a group of my friends suggested we drive up to the Esperino service at the

Church of St George on the mountain. It was a mild night and hundreds had turned out for the service and celebrations that took place afterwards, with of course, plenty of Greek food, wine, music and dance.

The weather had turned cold again, but that did not deter me to do as much walking as I possibly could to accompany the Icon of the Mirtidiotissa on her



annual Gira around the island. I managed to walk from Mitata to the bridge below and back up. I walked from Potamos towards Agia Pelagia nearing the fresh water spring of Galani and back to Potamos. I followed the procession from Potamos to Melitianika, Trifilianika, Logothetianika, Katsoulanika, Kousounari, back to Logothetianika.

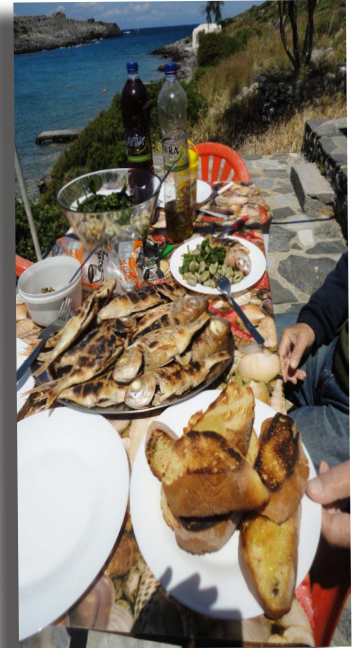
I had the great honour and privilege to actually carry the icon on my shoulders for a part of the journey from Areoi to Milopotamos. On my final Sunday in Kythera we attended the service in the church of St Spyridon in Kalokerines and then the procession of the icon made its way home to the Monastery. I ran in front to get photos and powerwalking with me was a lady aged 83, wife of a Livadi priest who had sadly been run over a few years ago, who told me she had been unable to walk properly days ago suffering from Arthritis, but there she was believing that the Mirtidiotissa had given her



the strength to do so. The procession made a solemn stop whilst the Mitropolitoli performed a mnimosimo for the late Manoli Kourmouli who was sadly killed near Mirtidia. As the icon made her way into the church, the final part of the process was to adorn the icon with all the gold necklaces and trinkets that we normally see on her, before she was placed back

behind glass in her thrown.

May Day was another public holiday in Greece and traditionally as is the case in Kythera, most houses are decorated with flower wreaths, placed on their front doors to welcome in the official start of Spring. As I was not sure how to make a wreath, I collected wild flowers and roses from our garden and made them into a bunch and hung them over our front door. Another tradition observed in Kythera, is most people go out to enjoy the sun and warmth of May Day by having picnics. We were luckily invited down to Limniona Beach where my dad's first cousin owns a little fishing kamara and we were treated to BBQ fish, artichokes, bread drizzled with Kytherian olive oil and sprinkled with Kytherian oregano, fresh Vlastaria, broad beans and chips made from home grown potatoes cooked in Kytherian oil sprinkled with local salt and oregano. We thoroughly enjoyed this truly rustic but exquisite meal by the sea.



I truly had some great experiences, very different to those of the summer season. For me this is what Kythera and Greece is all about, being with "My" people enjoying the local customs and food, truly experiencing the difference in what each season has to offer and enjoying the simple thing in life, one can only appreciate whilst in Kythera!

Kalie Zervos

