

ANGELOS KALOMIRIS

A MAN FOR HIS TIME

The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis

ANGELO KALOMIRIS



Angelo Kalomiris was born in a village Kontia, Lemnos (ANZAC HOSPITAL) On the 29 November 1935 born to parents of Stavros and Evdoxia.

The parents survived by producing wheat, cotton, wine, growing their own vegetables, with sheep and goats as meat supplement. The island had a large population of flamingos which is now a tourist attraction.



He was born in a two story stone house which was atrocious and cold in the winter and cool throughout the summer months.

The house was adjacent the village church. And the villagers would often be around the home. It was popular place due to its proximity.

In 1939 prior to the outbreak of the second world war was four year old and remembers his grandmother the day she was buried, unfortunately he never had the opportunity to see his grandfather who had passed away some years before while his father was a young man.



Angelo helped his parents and would often go to the fields to help in cultivating the fields.

The children would take the food cooked by his mother to their father.

Angelo cannot remember having to go hungry prior to the war and felt that were sufficient food to feed the family.

Hunger only came during and after the war when the island was ravaged by the war and produce difficult to create. It was not unusual in those days to also produce "tsiporo" a drink distilling the grape stems. Tsiporo was drunk during the cold periods throughout the year although it was also drunk at other times. Tsiporo could be drunk with ice as well.



During the Great War, the island became the base of the Allies and the English made the port of Moudhros their base. Lemnos was under the German Occupation from the 25th April 1941 until the 16th October 1944.

During the Civil War, Lemnos became the island of exile, which gave new reasons for emigration: the total population of the island decreased more and more

The village had a population of 1800 of which many were made up of children.

The produce from the village was similar to the produce created by the Kalomiris family.

The village was located under the shadow of three mountains and with an outlet to the sea within walking distance.



The temperatures ranged from snow in the winter to dry and hot summers. It was not unusual for the temperature to soar and to be without rain for some time. However if you visit the village now the temperature and climate have changed and there is a plentiful of rain. During the winter months Angelo can remember playing in the snow, playing hide. The parents were well known in the village and respected. The father was known "Barba" Stavros.



World War 2. During the Second World War, the German army occupied all of Lemnos and remained there until the cessation of hostilities.

When the Germans first arrived, he was hiding behind a veranda and watched the Germans arrived on motor cycles and the villagers went and welcomed them.

He remembers the Germans training near his home and a rifle range being close by.

The Germans were much disciplined as an army and the majority of the soldiers were helpful to the islanders and used to go as kids with containers to the Germans to obtain and some food. Overall the impressions of the Germans on young Angelo were good. As a child the English spy aeroplanes flying over the island and the anti aircraft canons firing overhead to try and bring the allied aeroplanes.

Angelo said that he could see the planes as speck in the sky and the Germans trying to bring them down, but they failed. The Germans who patrolled the streets always gave out sweets and chocolates to Angelo and his mates.



Greek Civil War Near the end of the war, Greek irregulars (andartes) and special units made up of Greeks and fought with the Germans.

He remembers seeing the andartes coming down from the mountains with their rough exterior and long beards.

In his eyes they looked ferocious and women would come and greet them with flowers and would embrace the freedom fighters. The andartes would ask the villagers if there were any Germans in the other villages. Depending upon the location of the Germans the andartes would cycle from one village top another. The Germans remained in the village for a total of four years and left in 1944. As there were no forests or bushlands to hide the battles would take place in the villages of the island. He remembers bombs falling and the sound of explosions all over the island.



The Primary school had about 300 pupils and the school was beautiful building made of stone and large enough to house and educate the children.

There were at least 8 class rooms and also it had a museum which held artefacts from Africa Skins hides as many islanders had gone to Africa to make living prior to the war.

After the war those living in Africa were most helpful in sending food parcels and clothing to assist the villagers in getting on their feet again. The primary school was only a five minute walk. The High School was located in the city of Mirina the capital of Lemnos. The high school was approximately nine kilometres away and to get to it Angelo would go across country each day to attend school.



The high school was considered rather modern for its day and it was made of stone and rendered on the outside. The structure was huge for the island and the building still stands. Every summer children from every village would attend for two semester and then return to the villages. Using the kerosene lamps to see their way at night.

Although Angelo started school late due to the Second War he managed to get an education up to the equivalent of year 9 high school.

He was fortunate that the civil war did not affect his education or the village life for that matter. He remembers studying under the kerosene light. At the age of 16 and half Angelo left high school at year nine. The reason for leaving high school at the age of 16 was dictated by external influences outside the confines of the village and the island.



Angelo and his parents 1954 Those same relatives living in Australia suggested that it would be best if Angelo would learn a trade as they were in demand in Australia. As a result Angelo went and learnt to become a carpenter for two years. Learning the trade in the village under the guidance of an experienced carpenter.

At the age of 18 and half, his brother (who had already migrated to Australia in 1952) sponsored him to Australia and as a result Angelo was able to arrive on the Australian assisted passage scheme.

He left the village on a hot Sunday afternoon in June 1954 with his parents and took a ship to Athens where they stayed for six days so that they could go through customs and be processed for the ship to Australia. His parents and his cousin Evfridiki took him to Port of Piraeus where he boarded the ship Kyrenia with many other Greeks from all over parts of Greece.



Angelo with his parents and a relative at Port Piraeus Greece 1954 before leaving for Australia

He remembers his mother and father looking down at his parents and his cousin and seeing the pain and anguish of his parents faces, knowing that he would not see them for some time.

Angelo could not stop the welling of emotion that was building up inside of him and he sobbed quietly know that he was to be apart from his parents. As the ship sailed away there was an announcement on the ship that afternoon tea was being served in the dining room and to his amazement he found that the tables were full of food.

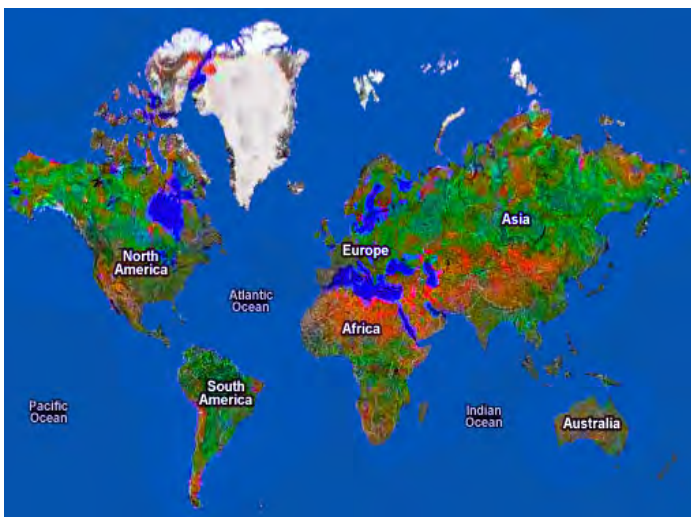
All the young men and women and gorged themselves on the food as they had not seen so much food in their lives. The ship the Kyrenia had an interesting career. During the voyage the passengers played games such "Geeze". The game was played by placing one hand over the face and the other hand under the arm and behind them. The idea was to guess who had slapped the hand. This game was played by six people.



The ship Kyrenia which took Angelo and thousands of Greeks to Australia in 1954

Other games played were card games, "tavli" and many on board ship games. He remembers some Greeks that had come from Macedonia who had never seen the sea and would stay in their cabins and would not venture out onto the deck.

He remembers one day during a heavy storm, a Macedonian lad who was moaning and regretting that he had left the village and his parents and the comforts of home. The storm was so great that no matter what the other passengers did to comfort him; he could not be quietened and or consoled. The young Macedonian did not quieten down until the storm had abated. The ship did not contain many families but many were young men and women.



The ship went through the Suez Canal stopping at Aden and Colombo before arriving at Fremantle port in Western Australia.

Angelo remembers quite well at Colombo where passengers would throw coins into the clear water below and see the local people jumping into the sea to retrieve the coins.

At Fremantle they all disembarked and made their way to shops to get food. They ball went and purchased chocolates and bananas. It was a pleasant afternoon and they all gathered in a park close to the port and kept a close on the ship. When the ship whistle went off to advise the passengers to return, they all left in a hurry leaving all the rubbish behind. As the ship left, within ten minutes of sailing there was an announcement on the ship that

They had on the Fremantle, (West Australia) radio that a ship that had just left the port and that the ships passengers were an extremely uncivilized lot by the amount t of rubbish left behind. From Fremantle it was only a five day trip to Princess Pier in Port Melbourne Victoria. The trip from Piraeus to Melbourne took 31 days.



Angelo aged 18 years old When he arrived in Melbourne, Angelo found employment quickly and settled down amongst the Greek Community.

He worked very hard a number of jobs and was very successful in the jobs he became involved in.

He soon found that he had a flair for organising and the ability to find solutions to problems that he and others were faced with at that time. However being a young man, confident in his abilities, with the burning desire to do well in his adopted country; was highly motivated so that he could arise the language and cultural barriers the early years.



Attending a blessing by Father Moutafis with Guest Speaker the Hon Simon Crean

However despite any setbacks that he may have faced, Angelo found the time during his formative years (living amongst the Greek community, in Melbourne, in building up his network of friends and associates of which he is still closely bonded to.

Friends like Con Baltas, Arthur Rovolidis, Moutafis and Zafiropoulos families. All these friends were together in the early years building the community of Oakleigh into one of Australia's dynamic Greek communities. Angelo Kalomiris besides being a pleasant, quiet and placid person was also a determined one who would put aside his personal time to help others in the Greek and wider community. During these early years in assisting the community, he found the love of his life and after a brief romantic courtship married his fiancé. Angelo and his wife shared many memorable events and together they achieved much in their life time.



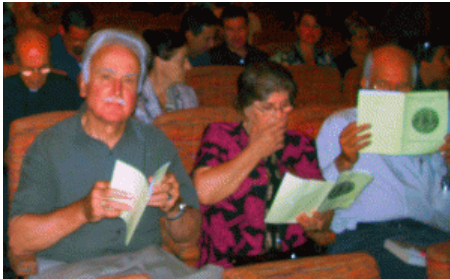
Angelo and his wife apart from the community work and assisting others always put aside the time to be with each other and their immediate family and close friends.

Their children are successful in their own right and have done well in their chosen careers.

One can honestly point to the upbringing, ethical and moral values instilled by Angelo and his wife that their children have done well this day. They had placed a high value on education and wanted their children to reap the benefits of their sacrifices during their formative years.

As the years rolled by and the children began to develop and go their own ways, Angelo and his wife were always seen to be involved in the community and its affairs. If it was not in assisting in the fund raising, they would be involved with the welfare and organisation aspects. If they were required elsewhere or the Father Moutafis required their expertise and/or their support they would make sure that they were available.

On many occasions when his good mate and lifelong friend Con Baltas was unable to attend any function or a meeting, Angelo would step into the breach and attend in his friends place. The Baltas and Kalomiris families were united in many aspects having built up a rapport, bond and friendship that stretched back many years.



As the years went by, Angelo became further immersed into the organisational structure and management of the Community and was elected onto the Management committee where his organisational and network skills were put to good and practical use for the benefit of the community.

There were buildings to be purchased, buildings to raze to the ground, events to attend, functions to organise, speeches to be made, his attendance at carnivals, political events, fund raisers, religious events and welfare support to be taken care of. There are many in the community today who believe that many of the success during the presidency of Con Baltas are as a result of his closest confidant and good friend Angelo Kalomiris. They point out that it was Angelo Kalomiris who was able to foresee and plan ahead many of the intricate management issues that had to be overcome.



Angelo about to be introduced to the Prime Minister of Greece 2007

You could never accuse Angelo Kalomiris of seeking the limelight or the publicity regarding his good works behind the scenes and always prepared to allow others to take the credit for much of his work.

Whether this humble and quiet nature is as a result of the influence that Father Moutafis had on the community is not known.

What is well known though, is that Angelo Kalomiris was always on hand to provide the necessary support during the difficult years to his friend Con Baltas, father Moutafis and others who needed his support. It should be of interest to the new generation that individuals like Angelo Kalomiris are few and far between and that the examples he leaves behind may be emulated by the younger generation.



Angelo and his two good friends, Con Baltas on the right and Angelo Sardellis left. One could go further and add that there are not many who would really understand the depth and the positive influence that he had on the Management committee when it was beginning to develop and grow in to the dynamic community that it is today.

Angelo like many others of his generation was also one not to seek publicity and/or the limelight but preferred to be working behind the scenes in ensuring that everything was working according to pre-planned strategic plans. Angelo would be the one who would stand in for a community dignitary if he was late or failed to attend. It was Angelo who was called upon to provide the necessary influence in quarters where others had no experience in or failed to understand what may have been at stake.



Angelo was also quick to make an appreciation of a problem and come to a quick conclusion of what the main issue and what the solution was in a matter of moments.

His observant and keen sense of appreciating what was required enabled him to view matters as challenges where others viewed the same as barriers or obstacles.

It was this thought process that enabled him to arise above the others and eventually have bestowed upon him the title of a Honorary member of the community.



Life however has its high and low points and one must take what God has given and taken away. Angelo was grief-stricken when his lovely wife passed away leaving him alone and with the children. Some years later he suffered another grief in the loss of his daughter due to ill health.

They may have both departed from this life, but would be happy in the knowledge that a father, children and grandchildren were in the good hands of the community. Both his wife and daughter were instrumental in helping Angelo support the Oakleigh Greek community.



Angelo in 2007 Angelo continued working for the community and being involved as an honorary observer at the Management Committee level providing assistance, subtly showing the pathways that led to success and avoiding the pitfalls that his predecessors had fallen into and above all providing assistance to the elderly and many of his generation that were fast approaching the elderly stage of their lives.

Angelo can truly look back and say that he had a remarkable life full of joys and laughter with few if any regrets. Angelo Kalomiris is truly one of the World's gentlemen who deserves to be honoured and considered for an Australia Days Award or a similar award as a recognition for his services. A man who is often overlooked by his peers, because of his quiet achievements, diligently working behind the scenes to better his community.

Nowadays, Angelo spends time with his immediate family, close friends and continues to maintain a close and kindly eye on the community that he and others helped build. History hopefully will judge him kindly and future generations will be able to reflect on his life and wonder just how he was able to arise above community ignorance, lack of the English language and the innumerable miscellaneous barriers that faced the generation of his youth.

Postscript. *I first met Angelo in 1954 on the ship coming to Australia. I was only four years old and doubt that I would have been known to him. Suffice to say, I met up with him many years later in my role as the Oakleigh Greek community's Business and Public relations Manager. I must confess that the relationship could have been far more cordial but alas as always. fortune does not always favour the brave.*



The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis is a (not for profit) Journalist/Commentator. He is a retired Australian military serviceman and an Industry organisational & Occupational (OHS) & Training Consultant whose interests are within the parameters of domestic and international political spectrum. He is an avid blogger and contributes to domestic and international community news media outlets as well as to local and Ethnic News. He holds a Bachelor of Adult Learning & Development (Monash), Grad Dip Occupational Health & Safety, (Monash), Dip. Training & Assessment, Dip Public Administration, and Dip Frontline Management. Contact via Email: abalinx@netspace.net.au or via Mobile: 0409965538