



THE VILLAGE PELLANA

Abalinx 6 August 2017.
Peter Adamis

It is 4.42 am here in the village of Pellana on the 6 august 2017. I kicked myself for not ringing my old mate Eddie Black for his 62 Birthday after making all the necessary preparations to do so.

(Eddie and I have known each other as mates since 1974 when we were with a Coy 6 RAR). I stumbled out of bed at 1.15 am, rang my wife and had a chat as it was morning in Melbourne followed by a cup of coffee. I don't whether it was insomnia or whether it was one of those nights where you rest and find that you have so much energy within. Whatever the case may be, I went outside into the back yard area and sat down under the two olive trees where I had erected an umbrella, table and chairs.

I listened to the crickets, yes they have crickets over here, saw the shadow of a flying bird maybe an owl or was it a bat, I really don't know other than it passed overhead. I must say the orchestra of crickets at night have a soothing effect on a troubled mind or someone seeking solace and some form escape from the world of technology and the bustle of everyday living. In the distance I can hear a number of dogs barking, whether they are barking at the moon, an intruder, predator or merely making a nuisance of themselves is hard to say. On the other corner to the East I see the new highway and the odd motorcyclist making a racket while the faint sound of a church bell being rung three times is also heard for reasons unknown and unusual at this time of morning.

Bugs of every sort whether it's an flying or non-flying insect matters little as they all battle to survive in the night avoiding capture from their larger brethren such as spiders, geckos, lizards and other moonlight predators. In addition, I hear the howling of some devilish animal that is a cross between a weasel, a fox, a dog, a possum and a cat. I cannot pronounce the name in Greek as it is too difficult for me to interpret but the locals know it so well that they will do anything to exterminate them for they are natural predators against the ducks, geese, roosters and chickens.

I look over to the West and I notice the moon large as life hanging like an orb in the sky except that it also appears to be cradled between two mountains of the Taygetos Mountain range. What is more spectacular to watch the actual movement of it disappearing over the crest of the mountain like the flickering of a candle slowly going down and down until there is no more light. I captured it on my mobile Samsung 7 model, as it has an excellent camera for the sake of prosperity and to remember the moment. It is a beautiful dark morning waiting for the sun to rise in the East, but that is not for about another hour or so. In Australia, one can find such serenity in the countryside under the moon and the stars and there experience the beauty of the environment.

The reader will wonder what in heavens name has this got to do with the Village Pellana. Well absolutely nothing except that I happen to be living in the shadows of the village and wanted to capture the moment. Other than that I guess I can feign insanity and state that I veered off course from the starting base. Today I would have been in Pellana Lakonia Greece for exactly four months and it is fitting that I record my thoughts for just that occasion. My wife and I had a lovely six weeks together of which I posted a few entertaining clips and images of our trip together in the Mediterranean and Greece proper. I say entertaining because I fantasised that I was an Aussie refugee trying to get back to Aussie and that I was being held by local authorities in prison camps and concentration camps a places like the local tourists spots, splendored hotels, idyllic beach fronts and Aegean islands. My cobber digger mates took it all in fun and laughed at my expense. After all is, that what life is all about.

Having bored the reader, I guess I will write my thoughts about the village, what the people are like compared to Australian country folk, their outlook on life, how they work, interact, communicate and behind the scenes activities that are unbeknown to the outsider. Mind you, I don't profess to know them after a mere four months, but my initial thoughts are worth considering and comparing them with my thoughts prior to leaving. What I do know is that despite all the robberies, the deceptive practices, the ventilating, appearances of animated anger and masks of smiles, I don't not wish to leave the place of my birth a bitter man and therefore will ensure that I place everything into context. On reflection I would hazard a guess that it is the right approach to take and not to be too judgemental or make comparison with those Australian values that I have grown up with.

The village of Pellana in spite of its historical roots going back to the mythical if not true Helen of Troy that launched a thousand black ships to bring her back from Troy; is still a sleepy little town of approximately 180 to 200 souls which swell to 250 to possibly 300 when the warm weather approaches and at the height of the tourist season. One's first impressions of the village folk is one of caution and will warm to the unknown individual until more is known of them.

If you are from countries such as Australia, they will ask you if you know their cousins Giannis, Maria, Evangelos, and Eleni and so on in cities like Melbourne or Sydney. If you are from the USA or Canada, they will ask the same questions except that the most likely cities asked of you would be Toronto, Quebec, Chicago, New York, Florida and so forth. These three nations are where most of the Pellaniotes migrated to as early as 1800. Others made their way to Germany, Argentina, France, England and even Russia post WW2 and still came back each spring to enjoy the comforts if any of the village.

The first Pellaniote to migrate to Australia was Peter (Pop) Morphis and his brother arrived on the East Coast some time during the early twenties, travelling throughout New South Wales and Victorian country towns employed as cooks and waiters. His brother however felt melancholy for home and returned leaving Peter to fend for himself during the Great depression. Peter in the late forties post WW2 brought out his two nephews Nick and Arthur. By pooling their funds they leased the Seven Creeks Café at Euroa, a Victorian country town in Ned Kelly country and brought out their other brother to assist them.

Later in 1954, after my grandfather had spoken with members within the village advised my father and mother to migrate to Australia rather than the USA, saying that reports from regarding employment opportunities were good. Suffice to say we left on the 10 June 1954 and arrived in Fremantle Perth on the 23 July 1954. We remained in Perth for over a year and then travelled by train to Melbourne where we caught up with pop and his two nephews Nick and Arthur, whom we adored as children. Sadly all of them have since passed away.

I remember going to Canberra for the Australian Defence Force Recruiter programme with the aim of identifying reasons why non Anglos Saxons were not enlisting into the Australian Defence Force. Whilst in Canberra, I visited the Hellenic Club and met some old timers in the club downstairs. A few who I spoke with remembered well Peter Morphis from days of old. Pop as we called him was a wonderful and warm character and my father who loved him, had nothing but praise for him. Mum and dad finally caught up with him before Pop passed away in the village leaving his fortune to his two nephews. Pop (Peter) Morphis deserves an article on his own as a mark of respect for being the first Pellaniote pioneer to Australia.

Others who migrated to Canada and the USA fared better than their brethren who went to Australia mainly because of established Hellenic families that had migrated some fifty and one hundred years earlier. The Greeks who went to Australia in the early fifties did not have that luxury as there Greek population in Australia in the early part of the twentieth century was hardly a blimp on the Government surveys, even though they did serve in WW1 and WW2. The Greeks of the Fifties in Australia therefore arrived on fertile soil, eager, and willing to work hard to make a living and a better quality of life. This reminds me how I hated to hear the same words ringing in my ear day in and day out; “we came out to Australia for you kids and to give a better quality of life”! Man I hated hearing that all the time. I was just a youngster, what did I know? I took things for granted and learnt along the way. It was not easy for myself or my siblings.

The village itself is located directly upon the ruins of the ancient capital of Lakonia and it is forbidden to dig with a permit and approval from the Archaeological Antiquities Department located in Sparta. It is with good cause that such approvals be made before hand because ancient Pellana has not been full excavated and one does not believe it will happen in my life time or my grandchildren's. The history of Pellana is so rich in history that it comes close rivalling Mycenae the ancient sister located in the Argolid near ancient Tyrin's and Nauplio the first modern Capital of an Independent Greece from the Ottomans. Mind you Mycenae was ruled by Agamemnon the brother of Menelaus who ruled Pellana before going off to Troy to bring back his wife Hellen who was abducted by Paris.

The main village is situated to the left of the palace and near the "vrisi" (watering hole and village square) which has now been modernised without considering the ancient ruins that still existed and the thought as to their value upon mankind. There are three taverns near the vrisi followed by two others higher up the hillside which leads to Prophet Ilias church located at the top. It is of interest to note that most if not all churches that have been built in Greece were built over existing pagan temples as one means of eradicating paganism. What is also of interest is that the Spartans were the last to be Christianised within a Christian society.

During the nineteen fifties the village square boasted of no less than seven taverns catering to the nearby villages and approximately 1000 individuals. There were also saddlers, bootmakers, wine cellars, assortment of shops, a large lagoon with flocks of ducks swimming and a few ancient arches to remind visitors and locals that Pellana was once a thriving metropolis and capital of the Mycenaean world long before the arrival of the Dorians. While further up another five to seven other taverns were located catering for those living higher up. Today, it is a far cry for those early years and yet the village square during the tourist season somehow appears to be full of people from God knows where.

There is much to see in the village if one cares to look. Apart from the two main village squares the lower and the higher, there is the palace ruins and the ancient homes and walls located near the "Palio Kastro". There is the Royal tombs further to the North upon which the local historian Steve Maheras can provide an impromptu talk to those willing to listen. Then the visitor should he wish to can hire a buggy or a local with their car to be taken around the village and shown the sites and places of interest or of homes and wells so ancient that only a few know of their existence and the reasons for their location. Those who are more adventurous can with a guide be taken to the "Enalipsi" Stalactite cave located some three kilometres from the church Prophet Ilias near the top of the village hill.

Finally, those who are willing may also visit the five year ANZAC GARDENS PROJECT, located some 500 paces to the East of the village on a small knoll where a tribute to Australian and Greek veterans is being built privately. Finally after all of the sightseeing is over, the visitor can eat at any of the three taverns proving meals. Dinas Snack Bar, Giannoulas tavern, Maliaros Tavern up on the hill or a refreshments at Georgias also located higher up on the hill.

It is hope that by the end of the year, maps and information on the village will be completed and/or placed on the internet for visitors to download. If plans go well, information may also be found at the local taverns and snack bars. Souvenirs are in the plans for a small cottage industry to operate but are still at the embryonic stage of development. The threads of change are starting to become together into some form of cohesiveness and mutual benefit for all the villagers concerned. There are many hurdles to be overcome, challenges met head on. These can be overcome by strong and consultative leadership, supportive community base and the willingness to follow through without any secret agendas or strings being attached.

In the village, we will find the egotists, the well to do, the opportunists, the town gossipers, the businessmen, the master tradesmen (based on life experience and not diplomas or education of sorts), the carers, the thieves, farmers, shop and tavern keepers, the elders who sit around at the village square watching the world go by, the casual tourists, the descendants of men and women of old who visit to see the place of birth of their ancestors. We also have casual workers who come and go with the odd one remaining for more than twenty years, settling down and being part of the community. Most of these workers come from neighbouring countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, some from Pakistan and now we see a sprinkling of Chinese infiltrating the villages selling their wares.

At night, most if not all of those found at the village square would be the men, with the odd woman who has come to have a break from their home chores. To the visitor, one can be excused for thinking that the village is back in the medieval days, but that is not the case as it is by choice rather than by custom. Women from the village since the seventies and eighties have left to find suitable employment opportunities in the cities and are reluctant to return until amenities and opportunities become better. One believes that with the new highway, Pellana will once again become a hive of human activity.

The Village square is where most transactions are made, communication about the outside world not found on the local television or newspapers; the occasional salesman like the fish, Chinese, vegetables and the odd magician can be found. Employment opportunities, family matters are discussed, letters being interpreted, advice being sought, complaints about water and electricity restrictions, judgements made rightly or wrongly on the character of selected village members and whatever other entertainment can be found sometimes at the expense of a fellow villager.

After four months, I thought that I had them all down pat until I noticed the other side of the villagers which is not openly seen, noticed or talked about. That is the caring and compassionate side of the villagers who care for one another despite their squabbles, acrimonious remarks, arguments, disagreements, friendships and transactions legal, binding or not. I was in for a rude shock to hear how thoughtful, kind, considerate and caring they were towards individuals struggling to make ends meet or were mentally challenged or handicapped by a physical disability of sorts. Each villager in their own way helped those in need.

I say this with some pride in the village people for although I was born here and not yet accepted 100 % as I live in Australia, I am pleased to see that hidden warmth and caring attitude towards those less fortunate themselves. I am reluctant to go into details as I would be letting the cat out of the back and expose those who hide behind the masks the display to the world and thus strip away the veneer of perceived toughness and seemingly uncaring persona. In all of these cases, each and every one of them is really a softie, but they do not wish to be seen as such and therefore put on that stern look to hide their compassion. Ahhhhh I would say to myself that is the “Greek Filotimo” being displayed in a way that only a Greek would demonstrate.

No sleep for the wicked they say for it is 6.08 am and I have written approximately 2918 words of which one could rightly accuse me of veering, diverting and going off on a tangent and they would be right. I just help myself as my mind is all over the place and it is as if I am in a hurry to finish the article filling in it with trifle matters that may have or have no relevance to subject. I guess in Aussie terms I am probably a bullshit artist. I guess my mates “Bluey” Peter Roberts, Sandra Mercer Moore and “Warrie” George Mansford would agree and both tell me to hurry and finish the bloody article. What is of interest is that all three of the bastards are Queenslanders. Oh well I will have more to say on the village later. Cheerio for now.

Last but not the least, despite being overseas, my heart still is in Australia. My current place of abode is merely to convalesce, recharge the batteries, help and support the locals and continue along the journey that appears mapped out for us. I wish all of my dear friend’s good health and best wishes, and hope that those currently living under harsh conditions that life improves for the better. Take each day as it comes and plan for the future. After all without dreams we as a species would never have evolved. Life as we know it can only be sustained by vigilance and with that vigilance comes responsibility. I will continue to write about what I believe is important and welcome constructive criticism at all times. Let us hope that 2017 and 2018 are much better for mankind and for our veteran community.



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