

EVERY DAY IS A BONUS

JOURNAL OF A STRANDED AUSSIE VETERAN IN GREECE

Journal 13 January 2021



Forward. This article was written on the eve of the Five Year Anniversary and is a conglomeration of many minor journeys taken over that period. I cover my time stranded in my place of birth, my wife, family, relatives and certainly my mates, military or otherwise. I could not have reached this stage without them. Much of that journey is recorded on the website at Abalinx.com and journals posted on social media via [Face book](https://www.facebook.com) and Academia and various news outlets and websites. It has been written to encourage others to survive the challenges of life.

12 January 2016. On this day some five years ago I was lying on a bed in the Olivia Newton-John wing of the Austin hospital. I was receiving my own stem cells only after it had been concluded that my siblings were not compatible with that of my own. The pain that followed was to remain with me for the next twelve months and be relieved by doses of painkillers and other medication injected by my lovely and supportive wife Yovanna.

I remember my wife telling me that should I survive and recover she wanted me to go to my place of birth and stay for a while to recuperate. It was also a positive reinforcement of my strong will to live. My survival instincts told me to take each day as it came and to whatever was necessary in order to survive. I was advised that in my case should I reach the survival rate of five years then my chances of living a reasonable normal life were good.

Today Wednesday the 13 January 2021, I am very happy to report that I have achieved the Five Year Survival goal. I must add that life has not been easy the past five years and life has been an enormous challenge. My faith in God, support of my wife, medical and hospital staff, a positive attitude, positive reinforcement from my sons' parents' siblings' relatives mates and lifelong friends who all played a part in my survival. It is therefore appropriate that I put pen to paper as a demonstration of my thanks to everyone involved.

After 18 months of treatment I was able to return to my place of birth. A home that has always been a part of me and yet so far from my adopted home that of Australia. I travelled to Greece in the years 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. During that time I created a Hellenic ANZAC Memorial dedicated to three nations Greece Australia and New Zealand as well as to all those who had been an important part of my life and have helped me develop into the person I am today. It is my final contribution to the ANZAC spirit and to that of my place of birth.

However what my wife and I never expected was that I would be stranded in my place of birth and never in our lifetime expected a virus to strike fear into the hearts of mankind. A plague if you like that has terrorised the lives of millions of people around the world. We did not expect that I would remain here until a vaccine was found to be effective and as such the distance and length of time from home became very depressing. As the months rolled by my wife and I would discuss all the options and came to the conclusion that I was far better off remaining in Greece until conditions had changed. Not an easy decision to make but commonsense and pragmatism played their part.

Now after some nine and half month's absence life in Greece has become bearable. It appears that God if you like had prepared me for this all my life. He had provided me with the life skills knowledge and survival instincts embedded deep within my psyche by my father who had always said never give up. Suffice to say life was not easy, but I made the best of it by renovating my parent's cottage with the support of my mother and brother Phillip.

My wife and children as well as mates sent gifts that assisted me in becoming self sufficient as possible. I found that although I had raised four sons alone from my first marriage, I was not a very good cook. I would often ask my wife and/or mother aged 90 for recipes and more often than not, I added more than what was necessary and failed in my attempts. Mind you, I am pretty good at creating soups. I just throw everything into the big pot, meat vegetables, herbs and spices and then wait for the result. On other occasions some kind soul in the village may provide me with a meal that I was unable to make.

My parent's cottage is located on a small knoll some 500 metres from the village of Pellana and 500 metres from the main highway that leads to Sparta which is 25 kilometres to the South and/or Athens to the East some 250 kilometres distance or three hours drive by car. The original cottage was merely a stable where my brother Phillip and I were born and it was inherited by my mother as part of her dowry when she was married. I remember some stories of my four years in the cottage prior to migrating to Australia in 1954 for a whole new beginning and a better quality of life. When my parents returned to Greece for holidays after many years abroad, they built a new cottage on the foundations of the stable.

As for the renovations, I am pleased to note that the cottage is rather comfortable with modern appliances and communication devices installed. Installed are Electric heaters and air conditioners, a bright kitchen and pantry, as well as three bed rooms for family and guests. The front and back verandas have wood heaters to reduce the cost of electricity which is expensive and one of the bedrooms can also be converted into a study. The ablutions and shower are modern and complimented by a separate lounge area for guests and entertaining. There are numerous stone fruit trees, approximately eighty olive trees which produce olive oil enough for four families, ninety grapevines, hot house, family BBQ area, parent's rest area, a water reservoir, swimming pool and a number of gardens supported by a tool shed.

As a child, I remember well my parents telling us time and time again that they had made the journey to give a better life and away from the squalor and poverty of a nation that had endured World War 2 and that of the Greek Civil War. Our arrival in Australia had also coincided with the armistice of the Korean War, a war that my father had requested to go as part of the Hellenic Battalion but was refused on the grounds that he was a married man with two children. In hindsight it was probably for the best as my father had also been an irregular during the Civil War against the Communist Forces prevailing in Greece at the time.

The above may sound all fine and dandy, but the isolation is at times unbearable and very depressing. This is especially so since Greece has imposed another lockdown based on their initial experiences with the first. I have now endured two lockdowns since my arrival in late March 2020. I was able to venture outside my isolated position to greet the villagers who had been apprehensive about my arrival during the lockdown period. However they soon warmed up to their usual jovial self when they noticed that I had observed the government 14 day quarantine period.

Whilst in quarantine, I reflected upon my journey south from the airport in Athens and noticed that people were observing social distancing, wearing masks and Police monitoring the traffic. The normal traffic congestion was rather absent and the stores did not appear as busy as my previous visits. I had taken a taxi directly from the airport and was driven directly down South towards my destination. An expensive journey it may be but one which paid dividends and well worth the expense. I was able to leave the airport as I had signed a declaration that I had a home to go to, not a burden on anyone and that I would have the support if needed. Each town and village that we passed seemed like ghost towns with very few people to be seen outside their homes. This did not appear a good omen to me, but I brushed the negative thoughts from my mind as I knew I was going to my place of birth and to my parent's cottage.

Arriving at the town named Kastania now renamed Kastorio; I purchased four weeks' food supply from my good friends George and Peter Paraskevopoulos. This was followed up by a groceries list three days later with meat from the butcher in Sparta. With my supply of food intact and the cottage being aired after months of being closed, I took stock of my surroundings. I visited the HANZAC Memorial which was located next to the cottage but separated by title, conducted a tour of the assets and what was still growing in the garden and hothouse. I was in luck because I found silver beet, kale, spinach, onions, herbs, potatoes, and lettuce.

Even though my culinary skills need further development, I felt that these vegetables and herbs gave me the base upon which to build my food supply. Having established the food supply, the cottage required a thorough cleaning which took me about seven days to complete. I was not in a hurry and anyway, I was in quarantine and no one would dare come to visit me. That part turned out to be very true. It is amazing how fear had embedded itself into the minds of the village folk.

When it came time to go forth and visit others, I did so with confidence because I did not have any of the symptoms associated with the virus and my body felt strong and healthy despite having turned the ripe old age of seventy three weeks before. Over the next few days after the quarantine, I renewed my friendships and made arrangements to visit Sparta, the Regional capital of Lakonia.

My young Nephew Nick Deros who is a Law enforcement officer had kindly provided me with declaration of movement in the event I left the cottage as we were still in lockdown. I had provided Nick with access to the security cameras as an added precaution and to keep an eye out for me. This access to my nephew has been beneficial for me as it is a deterrent to intruders and wannabe thieves who have little skill or knowledge of what an 'Aussie machete' can do let alone the damage it can do in the hands of one skilled in the art of jungle survival. I am sure my military mates can understand what I mean.



I found Sparta a wonderful place, built unfortunately on top of ancient Sparta which has caused considerable heartache to developers. To my mind it resembled a small provincial town with few people on the street, queues for those wishing to enter a shop, the bank or government department. The bars were closed, restaurants and small food outlets providing takeaways only, schools were closed, and the absence of youth as noticeable.

The fire brigade, Police, Doctors, Nurses, Ambulance staff and other front line members were taking their roles seriously and they too were abiding by the lockdown restrictions regarding health and safety. I must say that Petros Doukas the Prefect and his colleagues have done wonders during his term in office and should be congratulated on keeping the population of Lakonia safe.

Society in general did not appear to me as panicking but rather apprehensive and anxious about their current situation. There were reports of suicide and neglect as well as elderly fearing for their lives remained cooped up within their homes and not wanting to go outside. This aspect I found disturbing and wondered what would happen to someone if they had no one to check if they were all right.

Many of those who have died of the COVID-19 virus are said to have had underlying health issues which complicated health support, while others died of complications arising from the virus which their bodies were unable to respond to medical treatment. In one large city alone, a friend of mine went shopping only to be told that at least four of the shop's customers had passed away due to COVID-19 virus causes. It was enough to cause anxiety and self isolation to my friend and the family.

On a more positive note, my impressions of the youth was they were resilient, positive and yet angry that the lock down had placed restrictions on their daily life. Interaction with another human being was very important to them and as such they would find the means to meet each other during the day or when time permitted during the evenings.

Their normal gathering places were closed which restricted their movements, but here and there one could see groups keeping their distance from one another. I chuckled to myself to see many people walking their pets along with one or two friends, maintaining social distance rules and wearing masks. I say this because on my previous visits, I would hardly see people walking their pets in public. Now it was all the rage and a way to overcome the restrictions.

When the restrictions were lifted, society did not return to normal as expected and people still applied the social distancing less wearing of masks. The recalcitrant ones surprisingly were the elderly who still congregated together, advising everyone that they felt fine and did not have the symptoms of the virus. If you asked them what the symptoms were, you would get a variety of answers that had absolutely nothing to do with the COVID-19 Virus. In at least two cases these old gentlemen stated that they take the flu shot for the year and therefore they were immune.

Well, I can say with some satisfaction that when the second lockdown was announced and three families had been identified as positive FOR THE COVID-19 virus in early December, these elderly 'village lawyers' and 'wannabe medical experts' suddenly disappeared from view. Suffice to say, the good news is that these families were isolated and recovered from the COVID-19 virus symptoms. We have been very fortunate in our isolation and that may well be the very reason for the low impact in our region. In the North of Greece, it is another story and people have found it extremely difficult given their circumstances.

Since late March of 2020, the cost of living expenses began to rise and debts accumulated over a period of months. Rents on homes and businesses were not maintained or paid, shops closed or relocated elsewhere, less money was distributed within society, bartering and employment practices changed the world of work, a rise in crime as a result of poverty and inability to cater for one's family, migration of guest workers and refugees placed additional pressure on precious government assets, deaths being associated with the COVID-19 virus, frontline staff worked to the maximum.

This has resulted in severe depression, stress from long hours and no leave or rest entitlements especially prevalent amongst law enforcement officers and the court system inundated with a backlog of cases. Accountants have reported on default payments for annual taxes and measures put into place such payment plans or by instalments to alleviate the burden are doing some good.

The government from my point of view is not above criticism and yet to someone like myself who is an observer of his surroundings believes that the current government under the leadership of Prime Minister Kyriako Mitsotakis is doing a reasonable good job of managing the pandemic. The opposition parties, Syriza (Left of Centre), KKE (Communist Party), and other minority party's needle the government whenever possible in order to remain relevant. That of course is what effective opposition parties' roles are.

At the same time, the government is negotiating with their neighbours regarding sovereign nautical responsibilities, gas and oil assets, defence partnerships, allies in general, seeking new and renewing trade agreements, encouraging foreign investment and bolstering the Hellenic Defence Force as a deterrent against recalcitrant nations who actively seek to destabilise Hellenic interests.

As an observer, I am of the beliefs that despite the difficulties faced by the Hellenic peoples, that they will endure the hardships, restrictions and persevere. After all they have survived the global financial crisis, the draconian austerity measures and now will overcome the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, refugees' issue, and come to agreement with recalcitrant neighbours. I therefore have come to the conclusion that the Hellenic nation like the mythical ancient Phoenix shall rise above the ashes of oblivion and stand tall once more alongside European nations as equal partners and not as the poor relatives.

As for me, it would appear that at this stage I will be stranded here until at least September 2021, remaining in communication with my wife, children, Mother, siblings, relatives and mates. As long as I am able to do that, I too will endure whatever challenges I am required to face. Life is what is and we who remain have a responsibility to ensure that we do not give up on ourselves or others who are in need of our assistance.

I will be focusing on developing the Hellenic ANZAC Memorial in preparation for the 200 years Anniversary of the Hellenic War of Independence; I will be making sure that the memorial is prepared for ANZAC Day and that of the ritual burying of artefacts associated with the ANZAC spirit. I must add that many people from Australia and within Greece have been extremely supportive and provided their time, funds, skills and advice in the creation of the Memorial. In addition, I have other projects such as cleaning the stream Xerilla of rubbish that was dumped by irresponsible people, minor touches to the cottage and finally continuing with my journal and other leisurely pursuits.

With regards to the weather, it would appear that on Wednesday it is expected that the current North Winds will herald in a winter that was meant to start in late November. This is unusual for this time of year given the lack of snow on the Northern peaks of the Taygetos mountain ranges and that of the adjacent Parnon Mountains. If both mountain ranges manage to attract snow on their peaks then we in the valley will suffer a very cold and miserable winter. If not then this winter will emulate the 2019/2020 winter season appears to be mild.

With injuries received throughout my life time, it is not surprising that I am wracked with pain and I can understand why my body is riddled with arthritis. Surviving stressful situations, severe depression, three heart attacks and finally cancer, I will not give up. Whilst stranded, I subjected my body to physical tasks which enabled me to lose weight and now down to a healthy 77 kilos. This is a good thing, as there is less stress on the heart.

While my fingers give me pain, I manage to use one finger to type on my mobile and two fingers on the laptop. The remaining fingers and thumbs are curled and gnarled at times, cramping during cold winter months. Leg cramps come and go and I have been advised by the Oncologist that the pain and tingling sensation in my toes is associated with my chemotherapy treatment. Ringing in the ears is another issue which is probably associated with my time rifle shooting in my Defence Force career. This causes some headaches on my left side of my head. The back, neck, hips, arms, legs and ankles cause me pain and I just want to scream that enough is enough. But having said the above, so what. Every member who has served the nation has gone through the same or similar experiences and as such I do not believe that the public at large is truly aware of veterans who suffer in silence.

However despite all these minor ailments, I know full well of mates at the moment going through much more and doing whatever is possible to survive. Those mates of mine are either at home, in hospital or in rehabilitation at the time of writing and I wish them all the best in their recovery. As such, I am optimistic and take courage from my friends who are tougher than me and keep on fighting their health issues. **THEY ALL KNOW WHO THEY ARE.** I am quite sure that those who have gone through the treatment for cancer will be able to relate to the above. Therefore is it not appropriate to state in the opening title of this article: **Every day is a bonus.** That journey can be followed by visiting Abalinx.com and clicking on the menu named CANCER.

Is it not interesting to note that over the past five years the veteran community has lost so many veterans to the black dog? I have written extensively on the subject and I am not convinced that enough has been done to repair the damage. I know well from personal experience the damage the black dog does to one's persona and how it can affect the ability to function normally on a daily basis. The Government on all three levels, the Returned Services League, The Department for Veteran Affairs and bodies associated with veterans, should take up the cudgel, stop beating about the bush and do something constructive to put an end to veterans taking their lives.

Life is far too short to be dwelling on the past and of the decisions we made in our youth. What is important is the here and now, to share what we have with one another and grasp life by the throat and squeeze it until you have enjoyed every moment. Remove doubt, fear and all other negative aspects from your life and look towards a future that is bright and beautiful, no matter your circumstances. Beauty can be found everywhere, even at a time when chaos appears to be in supreme command and all seems lost, be happy in the knowledge that HOPE and FAITH have not left Pandora's Box.

In closing as always, I wish everyone back home in Aussie a great and fortunate year that will long be remembered as the year that life changed for the better. My warm and best wishes to all those suffering, in hospital, battling illnesses and other ailments, to never give up, for life and the world we live in is still a beautiful place. Mankind must do what it must in order to survive and yet mankind must also learn to live with the environment if there is to a future for our children and their children.



Peter Adamis is a Journalist/Social Media Commentator and writer. He is a retired Australian military serviceman and an Industry organisational, Environmental & 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), and Dip. Training & Assessment, Dip Public Administration, and Dip Frontline Management. Website: abalinx.com