2026 KOY Acceptance Speech – Florence Livery

In 1925 my maternal grandfather Michael Economides became the founding president of this association then known as the Castellorizian Brotherhood. How proud am I here today, 100 years later to be honoured with the 2026 KOY. From the Omonia Café in Lonsdale St to 250 Dorcas St South Melbourne. What a journey it has been for all of us and one which never seems to end.

I owe a lot to this grandfather, in fact to all of my grandparents, like all of you, forebears who left their homeland for a new land and a new life. Amidst the turmoil on Kastellorizo between the late 1890s and 1940s there were a myriad of reasons as to what was the specific catalyst that made each of our ancestors emigrate. For Michael Economides it was conscription, being targeted by the Young Turks in 1910 and about to be made an example of as he was the son of the Harbour Master. For his future wife, Florou Augustes it was escaping the bombing of World War I and living 'on hold' in Port Said until further instructions were given. 1920, these instructions arrived from Australia. Destination Melbourne. Job - to be a domestic and shop assistant for older brother. Emmanuel.

For my paternal grandparents it was in 1923, married with two toddlers, living under the Italian occupation. My formidable grandfather returned to Kastellorizo after spending 20 years in America. Facing dismal work prospects Uncle Jimmy wrote a letter from the sugar cane town of Ingham in tropical North Queensland, saying that the rainbow ends here… so off they went, leaving the vivid blue Aegean Sea for a flat, sparse and provincial town in the middle of nowhere.

I never met my Bapous. They passed away well before my time, but I felt I have got to know them through the world of history and research. But it was not them who motivated me, nor my yiayias. It was my father, Panos known to many of you as Pino.

In 1985 my parents, Pino and Mary, closed up shop after a married lifetime of fruit shops and milk bars and made their first and only overseas trip. Of course it included the homeland. In London Dad began to keep a travel diary. What started off as a few words jotted down on hotel stationery soon turned into a daily habit which stayed with him for the rest of his life. Travel diaries, memoirs, prolific letter writing, short stories and records of his thoughts and reflections on life

He returned home from this trip a different person. A man who for the past 35 years did not have any time for hobbies, a man who worked very long and arduous hours suddenly declared to his wife and daughters, ***'Someone needs to tell our story!'*** How fortunate for us!

Dad began his memoirs in 1985 aged 62 and kept writing until his health declined in 1995. The title he gave his memoirs – ***An Olive Amongst the Sugarcane*** alluding to the small Greek community of Ingham, at the bottom of the pecking order fiercely outnumbered by those of Anglo-Celtic and Italian stock.

As Dad either retreated into the study-turned-art studio to do his paintings or took over the dining room table to attend to his writings you could not help but become interested in his work. **There is not a shadow of doubt that my father has been my inspiration. It is he who should be standing here beside me today.**

Because of Dad I wanted to know more and so built up my own vast library of family history. I would carry around this old hat box full of papers, particularly at extended family gatherings and do impromptu interviews. This was family history at its infancy; the early days compared to the fashionable industry it has become today. My passion and love for Kastellorizian stories just kept on growing. Within myself I knew that we had a good story to tell, in fact a fascinating story but was unsure at this stage whether non-Kazzies would be so enthralled?

So, I never really knew where I was heading with my hat box and its contents. Serendipity. 2011 and I had recently retired as a Commerce teacher, and the association was looking for someone to take on their fledgling archives. My cousin Sandra Wyatt (nee Augustes) recommended me to the President, Yvonne Panagacos. We received a Significance Assessment Grant which included a week in Canberra learning the craft of archiving and networking with other grant recipients. Like a duck to water I knew then that this was my forte.

I came home and was like a sponge. I spent a couple of years cataloguing, reorganising the archives and then travelled around Melbourne reaching out to the community, expanding both the hard copy and digital archives. I soon realised that we were sitting on a treasure trove of memories and a rich source of material. Our social history was bursting to be told.

Three definitive episodes have sparked my momentum….

1. The first, 2013 and I will never forget the first historical event I did for the club when I can quite honestly say I transformed from being an Archivist into a Historian. After six months of research, I did a presentation on the YMCS, planned for a Sunday afternoon at the clubrooms, about 60 slides and lots of humourous anecdotes. The Committee was worried as to how the audience would cope, could they sit through 90 minutes of slides, so we planned an afternoon tea in the middle to give everyone a break and minimise restlessness. Well, it was a triumph and I can still picture Nik Spartels standing at the rear rolling his hands signalling no break, keep rolling. I knew then that our community wanted to hear our story.

2. The second episode …. Not too long after I gave a talk to Carlton Probus on the early Kazzies of Carlton. I brushed over the initial slides and so only did a brief overview on why they left the island and their pioneering days in Australia. ***No***, the audience called out. ***Go back. We want to hear more about these times.*** And remember the audience was not Greek ...

    - ➢ Tell us more about this island and why they left!
    - ➢ Tell us more about traversing the continent doing hard labour before they set up shops in the cities.

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➢ Tell us more about the shopkeeping phenomena, the good and the bad!

In that instant I realised that the Kazzie story was an appealing story, unique, with its many layers, one which generated curiosity. People wanted to hear it. Not just us, not just Greeks but also the wider population.

3. **The third defining episo**de…. As I grew into my role, I became determined to ensure that the Kastellorizians were included in the historical narrative of colonised Australia. Along with other early Greeks we have made a vital contribution to the fabric of this nation and earned our right to be included in the history books. There were a couple of situations where we were literally written out of history. This is further complicated by the dominance of post-World War 2 Greeks in publications, having to constantly remind people that there was a sizeable Greek community in Melbourne prior to their arrival. Two books really struck me – the 2004 Carlton; A History edited by Peter Yule where the chapter on Greeks only referred to the later Greeks and a recent book on the History of the GCM where we were only mentioned through two one-line footnotes.

   I am not blaming the authors for this. The more of a historian I became the more I realised that we had to be on the radar to get our story out in the mainstream, either through me personally, through the presence of the association or through access to our resources. This was the real attraction for the donation of our archives to La Trobe University's Dardalis Collection.

   And now there a quite a few people I must thank. This award is also their award.

My sincere appreciation goes to all of the KAV Committees over the past 16 years who have never questioned my activities, always trusted me and given me unconditional support. There are two office bearers though who have been relentlessly by my side for those 16 years - Nik Spartels and Christine Mastores. The two of them have always been a constant, and along with Connie Gregory who was the newsletter editor for many of these years, have continually supported my ideas and activities and prepared to get involved and assist.

Along the way I have entered numerous Kastellorizians homes, and I am ever so grateful to those who have opened their doors to me both literally and metaphorically. There are two Kazzies however who will forever remain close to my heart. Litsa Augoustakis (nee Stavrou) and Beryl Georgakopoulos (nee Nitis). Both are very special women. Both are wise elders. Both burst with Kastellorizian pride and untapped cultural knowledge. Both quietly effuse their Kastellorizian heritage. They are my role models.

To my many cousins here today and not here today I thank you – Augustes, Conos, Constance, Gillard, Jackomos, Kokkinos, Liveris, Wyatt and Xanthos …... it started to make me think about how we keep in touch with our extended families. For most of my non-Kazzie

friends it is through weddings and funerals. How fortunate for us that we still have a club as a conduit for regular contact and keeping us connected.

Now, can you recall that grandfather I told you about at the beginning. Well, he had two sisters Evangelia Koutsoukis/Constance and Alexandra Gillavis. Although we met at name days and other family occasions, as we lived across town in the outer eastern suburbs I really did not have much to do with their families growing up. In the last few years though I have reunited with Yvonne and Sandra, the grand daughters of Evangelia and Alexandra respectively. Two amazing women who I depend upon and who shower me with love, support and trust. I can see our forebears now, the three siblings smirking in their grave and pointing their fingers - I told you. Family is what matters the most!

And to my wonderful sisters Evelyn and Georgina and their families. Evelyn has travelled across from Perth to be here today. My sisters (and their families) are my life and I love them dearly.

I must also thank the Kastellorizian and Greek community – those who contacted me by phone, social media, text and email and all of you here today. To be honest I am feeling quite chuffed.

Finally, .. over the past 16 years I have come to really love these clubrooms more than any of you could ever imagine and understand except for maybe Nik Spartels. They are not perfect nor ideal, an old church hall with add on rooms at the rear but symbolic of so much more. How fortunate for me that the KOY celebrations have returned not just to the clubrooms, but to the original 1967 clubrooms ….. and how fortunate for me that the tenant is not a gymnasium nor a persian carpet emporium but a modern wine bar with capacity to hold functions like this – and for this I am deeply appreciative of President Nik Spartels and his immediate past and present committees.

I must also thank Bronwyn Paltoglou and her event team who under testy conditions, in the midst of a building site until just a few days ago, were able to pull off this event, always staying calm, cool and collected.

I would now like to leave you with an anecdote … 2016 and I had just been to an exhibition showcasing the Centenary of the Ithacans at the Immigration Museum. There was an interactive installation where individuals were asked to define themselves. The next time I was at the clubrooms I remember approaching Michael Spartels and asking him how would he define himself?
Greek? Australian? Australian-Greek? Greek-Australian?
His response – I'm Kastellorizian. …… Doesn't that say it all.

Pino Livery. This award is for you!!

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