

Kyriakides book

Prologue – Version 1

I was born in December 10, 1944, at the times that the Germans were leaving Athens, retreating in a hurry, having surrendered to the Allied forces.

My father, Stylianos Kyriakides and my mother Ifigenia, were leaving at the time in my Grandfathers house in a suburb north of Athens, together with my oldest sister Eleni, and another 3 members of the family, so the family were together for safety. This is where I was actually born, delivered by a midwife.

The civil war had just started, something that proved to be even worse than the 4 years of the German occupation. Greek Royalists were fighting against Greek Communists, relatives killing each other for the sake of politics.

Bombs were falling all over the place not knowing where they came from.

When I was 3 months old, a bomb landed just outside the room where I was sleeping, but fortunately for all the family it did not explode.

Since the German occupation had started in 1941 things were difficult for all people but especially those living in the big cities. There was no food, no medicine no heating, and only few cloths.

I don't remember the hardship of that time. It was sometime in the middle of 1945 that my father decided to run the Boston marathon again, hoping that he can do better than 1938 when he had to drop out because of severe blisters.

He wanted to go there to run and to try to win, but most of all no matter what the result would be he wanted to tell the people in the USA about the terrible conditions that his country and its people were in and ask his friends for help.

I later found out that when he told my mother about his decision, she could not believe it. She said to him that she thought that he was crazy. She said to him, "You have not run or trained for over 5 years, you have two kids to look after and you want to go to the other side of the world in a time like this? You look like a skeleton, you are so thin you are going to die!"

Of course having married in 1941, my mother had not seen my father run or train and she did not really know what kind of courage, strength and commitment my father had inside him. How she could understand?

My father started training slowly, but he realized that conditions in Greece were not good for his preparation for this mammoth task. He had to face the best runners of the time from the US and Canada who had not been under occupation for 4 years.

So he decides to take us all and go back to his home country of Cyprus where conditions were better and he can get some food and train in safety.

That was the easy part. The difficult part was that he had to find the money to buy his one way air ticket to go to Boston. The Greek Athletic Association had no money, he had to find the money by himself.

When he told my mother that they have to sell the house furniture to raise the money, my mother went crazy. But my father prevailed promising to her to bring a new electric cooker, a new fridge, and many other things from America, and he kept his promise

I don't remember his return to Greece after he won. But I have a photo of my father holding me and my eldest sister in his arms after he came off the plane.

He had not only won, but he had won in the world best time, and crossing the finish line he had shouted "For Greece"

The newspapers say that one million Greeks, in a population of 6 million were waiting to greet him and thank him for what he had done for them.

As historians say, "In 1946 Kyriakides was Greece".

We grew up in very difficult times. It took the country about 15 years to start recovering. But I remember growing up in a house with warm atmosphere, full of love.

My mother was taking care of the house and both of them taking care of the 3 children as in 1948 my younger sister was born.

My father, not having much education himself, made sure that we all went to good schools and later we all went to England for further education after high school.

My father was a generous and kind man, but he believed in hard family discipline, so he was also hard to us when we broke the rules.

I remember being punished when I disobeyed his instructions. I think that he was harder on me than my two sisters, because as the son, he was expecting a lot more from me.

Now I want to thank him for all he has done for me.

28 years after his died I have spent over 20 years putting in order the big archive he left behind and having searched and re searched about him, I think I know and understand the “Kyriakides the man” well.

I have spoken to hundreds of people that knew him and worked with him and I have not heard one person to say something negative about him. All who knew him loved him and admired him for his exceptional character.

They all talk about his hard work, his honesty and justice, his down to earth and very pleasant personality, his love for young people, his love for athletics and distance running. Most of all his courage and determination, and for never giving up to adversity.

His theory about life was not “ what is in it for me” but “what is good for the community”.

I remember that our house was like “a job finding office”. My father was so loved and popular in Greece that nobody ever said no to him, if he asked to help people in real need, like finding a job.

He also brought to our house, homeless children he found in the street and after keeping them in our house for a few days he found live-in government schools for them to study.

Kyriakides, his actions and deeds, is the perfect example for today’s troubled world, where success is most often judged by personal gains of wealth, and not one person’s contribution to the greater society and to those in need.

This original book you are about to read told only his story up to Boston 1946, so I have added a final chapter giving in brief his work and contributions to society until he died.

More important, over the last 28 years after his death, Kyriakides has been an inspiration to many long distance runners, and has been the subject of many conferences and talks all over the world and several marathons and long distance races have his name.

Disney pictures is now making a full action movie with the Kyriakides story