

## Greek arts

Boston Marathon victor  
Kyriakides flees by heart

World War Two deprived Stylianos Kyriakides of training, food and experience. A new book reminds the world of his amazing victory

By Angelika Contas

WHEN the Boston Marathon's doctors examined Stylianos Kyriakides' exhausted face and emaciated body before the 1946 race, they decided he was unfit to run. Having survived starvation in Athens, the 36-year-old Cypriot-born athlete didn't appear capable of finishing the race. But what wasn't apparent to any medical inspector was that the black-eyed runner had a cause: he would run for Greece. Kyriakides was first recruited in Boston to let the world know of the terrible conditions of the war-torn country and hoped to make a difference with his victory.

Upon the insistence of Greek-American entrepreneur and politician Yorgos Dimitrakopoulos, the runner was allowed to join the rest at the Hopkinton starting point. Later that day Kyriakides won the Boston Marathon's Golden Anniversary 50th race and set a world record with his 2:29.27 time. It was among the little good news Greece, in the midst of a civil war, would hear in years.

This story of mind over matter and of an ordinary, soft-spoken man accomplishing an extraordinary feat is brought to life ingeniously in Nick Taitos and Andy Dabibi's book, *Running With Pheidippides: Stylianos Kyriakides, The Miracle Marathon*.

The narrative builds almost tenderly (to its credit) to the page-turning excitement of the Boston Marathon race. It opens with an introduction by Kyriakides' rival and friend, the famed Boston Irish marathoner John Kelly, before quickly making the parallel between Kyriakides and Pheidippides. The book is built on a series of vivid moments in Kyriakides' life, all infused with a poetic spirit, though the authors' consistent tendency to draw classical parallels seems arbitrary as the subject's life is genuinely interesting and new.

#### Modest beginnings

There was little hint that the small-statured child born in the Cypriot village of Sitaro in 1910 would one day be honoured with a six-hour victory parade in Athens. Kyriakides, like the rest of the Greek team-mates who triumphed at the 1934 Balkan Games,

was born poor. His friends would only snicker and tease this fifth child when he had just begun to amuse an athlete.

Later, as a waiter in Limassol, he would make an odd sight in the evenings. After he'd finished



Taitos and Dabibi's book draws a parallel between Kyriakides and ancient Pheidippides (R). The marathon runner's composed expression as he reached the finishing line, 1946

washing greasy pan, Kyriakides would take off his apron and run through the dark streets of the city in his street clothes.

He was encouraged in his avocation by a later employer, British doctor Reginald Cheverton, a former athlete (although his household duties often interfered with a key race later). The 23-year-old's natural talent became obvious in his first real race at the Limassol Athletic Club. He quickly won the island's five-, ten- and twenty-thousand metre races.

#### Stellar career cut short

Kyriakides garnered impressive results in competitions in Greece, where he was released, and in the Balkan Games. The authors describe a meeting between the robust young man and the privileged 1896 Olympics' marathon champion Spyridon Louis after Kyriakides' Balkan victory in 1934. "No Greeks were born to run and always will," Lou told him.

There were hurdles too, which the detailed book relates, as Kyriakides took part in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, but finished disappointingly, and had to drop out of the Boston Marathon in 1938, despite high expectations, due to bloodied feet that were unaccustomed to the asphalt terrain. (The Boston race had direct links to Greece. It was launched in 1907 after a Boston delegation attended the revived Olympic Games in Athens in 1896.)

#### The war years

An important part of *Running With Pheidippides* relates how the Second World War halted all training of races. Kyriakides and his new family, like the rest of the country, fought to survive. They survived due to his job at the Athens Piraeus Electric Company. In more than one instance Kyriakides' athletic past helped him escape the fate of neighbours rounded up by the Nazis. Producing his Berlin Olympics memories saved the athlete's life more than once when he was questioned by German soldiers.

The idea to run again - and to win the Boston

Marathon - only came when Kyriakides returned to Cyprus after the occupation and was spiritually reinvigorated. When he revisited the island, the athlete had not run for six years, nor eaten a complete meal, saving food for his children, one of whom was born during the German occupation, and a second during the Civil War.

The book relates how he trained by running the mountain trails around Athens. He paid particular attention to hardening his feet after his last Boston defeat, often running barefoot over rough rocks. Kyriakides became a common sight to train passersby, running like Superman on the road between the tracks, determined, but still without proper nourishment, fuelled by an idea.

Kyriakides' triumph of willpower was to raise \$2500 for post World War Two Greece, in the days before the Marshall Plan. His company put him on the first TWA flight out of Athens in 1946. On the other side of the Atlantic, for a second time, the Daupers Greek hoteliers and restaurateurs offered their front too - and fed him on American steaks. Though the doctors that spring morning in 1946 may have been blind to the faded track marks, Taitos and Dabibi should be lauded for reminding the world of all the events that led to this inspired marathon run. "If we don't write our story, no one else will," Taitos explained, after a Deree College April 17 event celebrating the book's Greek translation.

The book is available in English at the Kedros bookstore (3 Gennadiou St, Athens, tel: 010-30-36-9772). The Greek version is called 'Tevnagvov Navev' (Kedros).

As an editor on Kyriakides who led at Boston's New England Sports Museum, and at Athens' Deree College and will travel soon to Thessaloniki.

#### Museums celebrate

MAY 18 is International Museums Day, and to celebrate the occasion, you can visit all museums free of charge. However, many museums are also offering their visitors some extra perks. In Athens, the following museums are celebrating their existence with special programmes. From May 15-19, the Greek Children's Museum (14 Kythioulou St, tel: 010-331-2995-6) is offering an educational programme between 10am-2pm, on the subject of Children's Museum of the World where the various activities realised by museums around the world for children, will be presented. Also for 11 children is a special programme on offer at the Museum of Great Greece's Art (9 Kodros St, tel: 010-331-2821). On Friday, May 17, the Jewish Museum of Greece 29 Nikiti St, tel: 010-322-5582 offers its visitors and its Museum on Saturday May 18, the Byzantine and Christian Museum (22 Vau Sophia St, tel: 010-723-1985) presents a special programme for young visitors and, entitled 'The World at the Byzantine Museum'. Furthermore, the Benaki Museum (1 Koumbari St, tel: 010-367-1043) presents its collection to viewers on May 18 for free. For those interested in ancient Greece, but also modern jewellery design, visit the Ilias Laloumis Museum (12 Kallipoli St, tel: 010-822-1041) for workshops and special programmes. Other events will also be taking place in museums around Greece, including lectures at the National History Museum of Athens (tel: 0210-470733), plus the inauguration of the newly renovated Pavlos Kontogiannis Museum, on the island of Hydra, now functioning as a community centre.

#### Plans for 'Penthesileo'

RECENT news of a scandalous nature, claimed that the staging of Heinrich von Kleist's dramatic work *Penthesileia* at Epidaurou was being threatened by a proposal by Mr Alekos Tolypidis, mayor of Akkiplio to replace it with an altogether more popular production starring Vasilis Iliou. However the latest news from the Attiki Cultural Society (sponsors of the Penthesileia production) is that the proposal should be discarded, and the truth is that all is going as planned. According to their work, we can still see forward to the world premiere of Kleist's work at the ancient theatre on June 21, and its repeat performance on June 22. Penthesileia was written by Kleist and is a tale of love between Achilles and the Queen of the Amazon Penthesileia, who he had mortally wounded at the battle of Troy. Directed by the much acclaimed Peter Stein, this production is as present being rehearsed at Italy's Ancient Theatre of Syracuse, where the production will also be performed in the public after its visit to Greece. The production will also travel to Spain and Austria.

#### Actor Delon's car accident

ATHENS. FRENCH-BORN movie star Alain Delon was involved in a car accident on May 14, 2003. He was not injured, Police said the car Delon was riding in collided with a passenger vehicle. The accident wounded another vehicle and was taken to his hotel. Delon is in Greece to attend a fashion show.

Cartoonists also enjoyed portraying Kyriakides' heroism



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## Bilingual corner

ONE might say that there are two kinds of bilingualism: one when the speaker knows two languages but keeps them separate and one when the mixes them up. The second variety has been the subject of study by Mrs Maria Tsakalidou who published in *A Reader in Greek Sociolinguistics* a paper entitled *Women on the Cup - a Case of Bilingual Women*.

It is well known that Greeks emigrating to Anglophone countries, in this case to Australia, retain their language over four generations maximum but often lose it within two. There is an obvious literature about why and how this happens but it is obvious that fluency in English is such a asset for the young people who wishes to maximise their life chances that not much time or stamina are left to learn the language of the increasingly remote "mother country." What Mrs Tsakalidou found is that women maintain their motherly

language better than men even at the expense of clarity in their speech as they are more prone to mix the two languages. The study of this 'code-switching' has yielded some interesting results.

So, for instance, when a surprise party was organised in honour of a bilingual lady she was overwhelmed. "But it's not my birthday today," she said. "I'm speechless. *Tevnagvov* appropriate? I'm (tried) really? I don't know what to say. Really overjoyed. I hardly know you people at all and you still honour me today?" She showed me a list of words. "The others with her at the time, "It's embarrassing from your when come true) say 'I've said enough' and 'with a good reason'." One of them even said "on my return" (with children) only to be rebuked "returner or 'ar return' thing on you, with children" (in another recorded conversation about an orthodox christening one lady says "the *Aratik*

[present] is just going to *Svlogion* [read]. There are also instances which the linguist calls "topic specific code-switching" meaning that the speaker calls, for example, arranged marriages by their Greek appellation "svlogion".

Interestingly a high degree of language awareness is also displayed when for instance, one lady says "when they train" (build, in the third person singular) but switches to "they're training" by the others talking but "when they practice" (build in the third person plural) the new house".

The research showed that code-switching occurs mostly when women speak in a relaxed atmosphere about cultural matters (names, food, customs). Mrs Tsakalidou concludes that "through its widespread and continuing use, code-switching becomes a meaningful resource of language and cultural maintenance for ethnic communities... maintenance for which women can partially take the credit".



By Mark Dragomira