**Feature Article – Kastellorizian Traditions**

As many of us are 2nd and third generation Kastellorizians living in Australia our cultural heritage is a blend of Australian and International traditions and as well as Kastellorizian traditions.

However at times of large celebrations, the Kastellorizian traditions are either over looked due to embarrassment or as a result of the lack of knowledge as to how to perform these rituals or they are not appreciated.

It is refreshing to see how enthusiastic Maria Georgeakopoulos was to embrace the Kastellorizian traditions in the lead up to her recent wedding to John Mavromihalis. In the following article Beryl, Maria’s mother tells how the family incorporated the Kastellorizian traditions on the happy occasion of her daughter's wedding.

**WHAT’S HOUSAFI?**

By Beryl Georgakopoulos (nee Nitties)

It is amazing what we remember when we have to. We think that we have forgotten lots of the past but it is all stored there and is remembered when the need arises.

This is what happened earlier this year, when it came time to make wedding preparations for our daughter, Maria. She was married to John Mavromihalis on 22nd February, 2009, and, needless to say, we were all keen to do as many of the Kazzie traditions as possible.

There was the **Krevati** to organize and I remembered that they sang **tragoudia** at my krevati.

*“But what tragoudia?”*

Ok, we got some out of my ‘blue Kazzie book’, and then I decided to compose some of my own which were relevant to us.

It was amazing as to how easily the words flowed, and I realised that it’s imbedded in us- not only the tune and the rhyme, but also the spirit of the song. Even though, my sisters and other brave volunteer singers sounded a little squeaky, we thoroughly enjoyed the joy of it all. How often do we get to singing tragoudia tou gamou and which of us Kazzies doesn’t know the words ‘ilthen I ora i kali’?

One of the stanzas which I wrote goes like this…

To understand what’s going on,

You have to be a Kazzie,

They keep their customs

In great style,

Because they’re pretty snazzy!

Also, my sister, Connie, remembered the **cloves passed onto cotton** and tied together with a white satin ribbon. So, earlier in the week, we all sat around the kitchen table threading cloves into little garlands, to give to our guests. The non-Kazzies were so impressed! What a fragrantly natural freshener for one’s linen and lingerie drawers.

Then came the **Savatovratho** – which we actually had on the very night before Maria and John’s wedding. Relatives and friends from overseas and interstate – about 45 of us – had a rip-roaring time. We sang more tragoudia tou gamou, seeing that I had asked Maria’s cousins to compose a few for her. Cousin Fiona Diamond (nee Anezis/Nitties) who came from Sydney with her family Carol, Danny and James Anezis) wrote a beautiful poem for Maria and John, which had us all in tears.

Earlier on I gathered all the wedding photos of past and present relatives – some dating back from 1922 up to the present. I had them copied in A4 black and white, and using white ribbons, I hung them all along the trellis and shrubs in our back court yard.

These photos were a great talking point for one and all – looking at aunts, uncles, looking at themselves as young bridesmaids, looking at relatives overseas, and generally reminiscing about how the Kazzies used to throw coins as the bride, groom and relatives were doing traditional dances in a circle. We, being very young, would swoop under their joined arms to gather up as many coins as we could!

We had **votana and incense** and blessed some of the couple’s clothes. We made the **pilaffi tou gamou, katoumaria** (see picture below), and **halva.**

Sister Connie remembered that Mum made a type of soumada tou gamou for our savatovratha. I looked up the ‘blue Kazzie book’ (by now it had become my unofficial Bible!!) which describes it as **‘housafi’.** I’m sure the recipe for **housafi** is well-known on the island but we of the diaspora are left to our own resources. So, Connie made up her own recipe, bringing to memory how Mum’s housafi looked. She doesn’t have exact recipe quantities but it turned out just like what we remember, and this is what she did.

She made a basic syrup – just like we do for baklava,

**2 cups sugar to 1 cup water (or multiples of this), some lemon juice**

**and a half handful of cloves**

**and 2 sticks of cinnamon**

**(she also added pimento but I don’t think this is ‘kosher’!).**

**After stirring till the sugar dissolved, she then simmer/boiled this gently until it reached syrup consistency.**

When it had cooled slightly she added a few drops of strawberry essence to give it a rosy colour.

We think that in the past they would’ve used cochineal but, seeing that this isn’t so healthy, Connie opted for something natural to add colour to the housafi.

She then strained it through a sieve, bottled it in a lovely decanter, tied a white ribbon around the bottle- neck and viola – housafi!

We served it as a kerasma, adding a small amount of housafi to cold water just like you would cordial.. It made a deliciously cool and unusual refreshment and looked extremely impressive in Mum’s crystal glasses which I have inherited.

We had a memorable, joyous time and we all agreed that the Kazzie traditions added much depth and meaning, not only to the actual wedding day, but also to the week preceding the wedding.

**It will be interesting if some of our readers can contribute what they know of the wedding traditions and, thus, enrich the ones that I have managed to uphold -** Beryl Georgakopoulos (nee Nitties)

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