

## Iniades: A Nocturnal Village

by Mei Gordon Washington

Iniades is where you visit *people*, where you wake up to the sound of a distant megaphone announcing the fresh *βερίκοκα* (apricots) and *σταφύλια* (grapes) being sold on the fruit truck rolling through the village that day, where night buzzes and dinner signals that the day has only just begun. During our visit, I had the pleasure and honor of staying with Dimitra Pitsikou and Pangiota Balomenou who welcomed me into their home with incomparable hospitality. It was the former who introduced me to the wonder of fresh *πεπόνι* (melon) in my morning cereal, who, in classic Greek style, ensured I was constantly well fed with *σπανακόπιτα* (spanakopita) and *γεμιστά* (stuffed tomatoes), and who always made me feel like I was in the presence of family. And it was the latter who offered me her room to stay in with unreserved generosity, with whom I stayed up until the early hours of the morning playing monopoly, and who took me around her village to show me her school, her friends, and her sunsets.

Our visit was in the middle of summer, when intense heat is suspended for months in the thin arid air. We were fortunate to witness a rare rainfall upon our arrival. Nonetheless, the village was hushed midday while the sun was scorching. People stayed inside during this time, napping, playing cards, watching movies. Houses hummed with armies of laboring fans. Stores were closed, streets lay still. *Night* is when Iniades awakes: teenagers and children ride bicycles, run, walk, dance, and play tag in the village squares. Beatboxes pulsate, a few stray streetlamps flicker above, but while the sun provides radiance during the day, night is illuminated by music, food, and conversation.

After dinner one night we set out as a party of three: myself, Panagiota, and a friend from my delegation, Owen. With no particular destination in mind, we strolled quietly along the dusty road as the first rosy wisps of evening crawled across the horizon. Something I learned very quickly is that going for a walk in the village is rarely a solitary activity, and before long your modest procession has become a boisterous gaggle of friendly faces and outstretched hands, English and Greek trip over one another in a

tangle of introductions and exclamations while iPhones are thrust around the circle exchanging social media contacts. In no other place have I been surrounded with such a crowd of warm exuberance.

We eventually met up with Eleni (another host), Annabelle and Chaney (two other Lawrence delegates), and a couple of Panagiota's friends. Our expanded party, after much wandering, came to a cafe, whose neon signs and sleek wooden paneling were a striking juxtaposition against the surrounding expanse of green countryside. We wrapped ourselves around a long table on the patio, and decks of cards were fetched from a display. Food was ordered and round after round of Spoons ensued. With each game, then with each hour, that passed, any remaining awkwardness of our new acquaintance dissipated, leaving only enduring feelings of friendship and festivity. Although simple, that night of playing cards and enjoying one another's company remains among my fondest memories from my stay.

Learning about each other's history as nations, and as cultures, is an imperative part of the Sister Cities Organization's initiative. Our group was privileged with a tour of Mesolonghi's Garden of Heroes, grounds inhabited by monuments dedicated to the Greek War of Independence. Visiting the Museum of History and Art, a stately building crowning Mesolonghi's main square, we beheld vivid paintings of the Greek Revolution and treasured artifacts like compositions of the poet Lord Byron, an extremely influential figure during Greece's grueling fight for independence and who remains a national hero.

I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to the Sister Cities Organization for providing me with such a wonderful opportunity, to Amy Meyers for undertaking the tremendous task of organizing our trip and ensuring the constant safety and wellbeing of our delegation, to Bob Schumm for his past and ongoing support, and of course to Demitra and Panagiota, who I hope someday will join us in Lawrence so that we can return their kindness and share with them many more delicious meals and chatter-filled hours.

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