

Dumpy

WABANAKI: THE PEOPLE OF THE DAWN

Dedicated to Emmy and Kyriacos

This trip would be a real detour! Ten hours by bus from the very heart of Manhattan to arrive in Bangor, high up in Maine where our friend Emmy would welcome us and take us to her cozy house by the Stillwater River next to a waterfall. The temptation was great, the attraction strong; how could we possibly say no to such an offer. Ten hours by bus! That is how long it took us to travel from Paris to Toulon and Cap Brun where Louis Aragon was waiting for us. The only difference then was the fact that we drove our small Fiat and every now and then we would take frequent breaks. We took out of the car our small refrigerator and the halloumi - a Cyprus goat cheese - was naturally great in demand.

While the express bus travels along overpassing several stations you have to make do with whatever your casual travel bag offers you. As far as bathroom needs are concerned, they are provided by the bus itself.

We knew very well what awaited us at the northernmost point of the United States. We had already read the books by Kyriacos and we plunged along with him in the amazing world of Daskalos, the Magus of Strovolos, and then climbed along with him once again The Mountain of Silence groping for the wisdom that emerged from the teachings of the elders who devoted their life to absolute goodness. And for the sake of accuracy, we both had experienced the impact that these books have had on all the four corners of the earth wherever they had circulated.

Next to Kyriacos stands Emmy with the amazingly powerful energetic field that she possesses. Emmy is a woman of action. How could I ever forget our first encounter when, like a magician she lifted her napkin in the air and the entire landscape lit up; the ecopeace village that she had dreamt of creating in Cyprus appeared like a magic picture in front of our very eyes!

Like a crusader, she would infect with passion whoever she touched with her magic wand. And then, there is an abundance of love and goodness, the deep care that she demonstrates for her fellow human beings, the bending down over every problem, however humble it may appear to be next to those great concerns of peace and ecology. She carries all these qualities in addition to the heavy burden of the drama of her small country which like a nightmare constantly crushes her heart because she experiences the pain many thousands of miles away, while living abroad.

This beautiful family is finally complemented by their two children, Constantine and Vasia with their own, unique style. We had read the poetry of Constantine and we were taken aback by the maturity of his thought, the richness of his language with its iridescence. And during her last trip to Cyprus, Emmy brought along with her the manuscript of Constantine's novel which she carried like a chalice:

"Lou Blue: The Love Story of a Lobster" was its title and this added an additional fine-tuned brush to the entire scenario since it took place in one of the tiny little islands that are scattered like diamonds along the Maine coast. The actual writing took place on the island of Monhegan, where there is a form of a communal living consisting of approximately one hundred inhabitants, and ended up on the island of Manana where he lived as the sole inhabitant accompanied by his boat Boumboulina. He also shared the company of lobsters which he fished as a sternman and whom he emboldened by giving them the power of speech and by turning them into the prime heroes of his novel!

Next to him stands Vasia, with her own wings that were not constrained by the space of the visual arts alone but spread out instead until they reached the high mountains of Tibet where she went as a University student, stayed for six entire

months and also met His Holiness, the Dalai Lama who helped her to acquire a taste of the wisdom of the East.

Our expectations were therefore great as the bus set off via Harlem and the Bronx heading north. The landscape was indifferent almost dull I would say until we reached Boston. Factories, huge malls, gas stations throughout the entire journey. Elli, the old veteran of travels throughout Europe, took out of her bag a book and immersed herself into reading. In my case I tried in vain to get an impression worth pinning down but one image succeeded the other with no differentiation.

The uniformity of the scenery was putting me to sleep –I began closing my eyes.

-Listen, listen, I overhead Elli's voice whispering in my ear:

She had discovered in our son's Nicos' library the fifth volume of "The Ways of the Archangel" by Mikis Theodorakis, which had vanished from our own library. We were very concerned because it was autographed by the author himself in the very first page with a spring-like, meaningful dedication.

-Read on, I told her because only "the tall one" can wake me up from my slumber.

I closed my eyes once again and I let myself flow along carried by the crystal clear and torrential words of Mikis Theodorakis.

Here he is, in front of my very eyes, climbing up the road of Agios Kostandinos and as he approaches Omonoia to be received with hoots by the team of the Square.

What a carnival that was! What a Carnival!

The captain of the army, he explains, in order to revenge the new conscript, when his papers revealed that he was a communist, gave him a uniform that only reached up to his knees letting his legs show! And he put it on and went for a walk to be soon stopped by the army police which warned him that he offends with his uniform the national army. His response was:

-This is what I was entrusted with by my country!

While in the army and after the recommendations of his music professor F. Oikonomides, he was assigned to the Philharmonic and became a guest to Michael Katsaros at his home in Halandri. It was the time of depression and the two men found an answer to hunger by participating in dinners held in popular, humble tavernas by young poets dreaming of recognition by those who had already gained some reputation.

Many of the pages of the fifth volume were written during 1988 in Verona where Zorba the Greek appears representing the three elements of music: the folkloric, the symphonic, and the Cretan. In Zorba, writes Mikis in his book, there is a harmonious coexistence of all the three elements that characterize my music.

Elli is carried away by the colorful, melodious and humorous flow of Mikis's words. She continues to read to me and certain pages leave me with a sour taste. I was quite familiar for sometime with many of Mikis' bitter experiences. We both shared the paranoid situations that we both experienced while being in the very heart of many significant events, whether the conversation took place in his home across the Acropolis or at his country house in Vrahati or in Cyprus, but also in Paris during the years of the military junta governing, at that time, Greece.

Elli now sets in front of my very eyes the stage of "The Song of The Dead Brother" by Mikis, which marked not only musically but also politically a time when the passions of the civil war in Greece were at their apotheosis. Right in the front stage stands Mikis Theodorakis who gives expression through his art and through his ability to guide people towards friendship and rapprochement. Narrow-minded political leaders, entrenched behind their stagnant and ossified dogmas, condemned the Song of the Dead Brother, an event which prompted Mikis to declare publicly:

-If you now have the audacity to close down a theater, imagine what you can do tomorrow if you get power in your hands?

Theodorakis with the magnificent opus that he created and because of his broadmindedness was being perceived with great skepticism by small-minded individuals to the point that they even recruited his friends to spy on him.

Minos Argyrakis, the caricaturist of the party newspaper, asked Mikis with great pain in his heart:

"What is going on, Miki? An irrelevant person like myself to end up spying on you and betray

...The bus enters the cement of Boston. We disembark for lunch; we still have five hours ahead of us for our journey, which will be accompanied by a dense, torrential rain. It is afternoon, the sun is still high up in the sky, yet the clouds appear to have descended so low that their dark tentacles seem to have enveloped the bus. I get the impression that we have entered a dark tunnel with no end in sight. Now and then some dim lights appear shyly in the distance only to vanish in the darkness once again.

There's worse than this, says our driver who notices our concern and tries to comfort us. There was a snowstorm last week while I was driving. At least we only have rain right now....

Next day, the huge forests seem to have swallowed up the black clouds and the lakes and rivers appear to have absorbed even the last drop of rain and early in the morning a sun appeared so bright that everything seemed to bathe in its light. I just became aware that our friend's home had its own river flowing by within ten to fifteen meters from its backyard. I sat in their living room in awe of the peacefulness of the landscape.

In a short period of time we were faced with yet more surprises. Emmy had scheduled in great detail our stay in their refuge. Our guide was Arnold, a Native American Elder who arrived humble, unassuming and peaceful like the Stillwater River. He sat across from me and his eyes, full of kindness, focused intensely on mine. His words measured, every single one in its place carrying its own weight.

-Five different tribes lived in these parts in the past but over time some were killed by guns others by the illnesses brought over by the Europeans and the rest were decimated by hunger. One of these tribes headed north towards Canada. Those who stayed behind, some 2000 individuals, settled on an island. I shall take you there to see it for yourselves.

Arnold never raises his voice, never reveals his real feelings even as he relates intimate stories about signs and wonders related to the life of his father. The Indian Island is only ten to fifteen minutes away from Emmy's and Kyriacos' home. Arnold leads the way to give us a tour of their Museum and then takes us to Eunice Bauman's house. She is the first Native American to have broken the glass ceiling by entering the University of Maine where she climbed all the way to the top by acquiring the title of Ph.D in Physics. Eunice is now half paralyzed and with her memory severely weakened projecting a fleeting image of sadness to the outside world for a historical past that has been wiped out. Eunice knows Emmy who had interviewed Eunice in the past; she pulls together all of her strength and she presents us with her theory of quantum strings which she has been working on for many years. She explains to us using a scientific lexicon how everything in life, whether animate or inanimate is interconnected and interrelated; Emmy encourages Eunice to bring closure to her work.

During our last evening in this magical place we were accompanied by two close expatriate friends, Dora and Lambros. They are both University professors, Dora a nutritionist with a rich, scientific background and Lambros a clinical psychologist but also a skilled captain with his own sailing boat. Dora comes from Mytilini and Lambros from Thessaloniki.

Dora brought along her accordion. Lambros who is also the cantor at the local Orthodox Church brought his guitar. We all sang to our heart's content and they all had such great voices! The repertoire consisted of old, nostalgic Athenian songs and Arnold who was sitting next to me sang along with everybody else. He had the ability to tune in and to keep up the beat. The Penobscot tribe, I read in one of the brochures of their Museum was one of the peaceful tribes that loved singing and dancing.

One word that drew my attention during my conversation with Arnold was the word "Wabanaki" which means "The People of the Dawn". The old Native American tribes of Maine believed that they are the first to greet the sun, during dawn and for this reason they have created shrines for worship on their tallest mountain, Mt Katahdin. And their prayers were made for simple things! They were asking the spirits to give them clean water in their rivers and in their lakes, clean air for the birds, animals and people, and for peace, peace...

Back in my own little island at the eastern end of the Mediterranean I am thinking that we are also Wabanaki. We are also the first ones from our old continent to welcome the dawn and the sun. We also pray for simple things. So simple, yet so very complicated!

TRANSLATED FROM GREEK
EMILY IOANNIDES