

## FOUNDER'S DAY CELEBRATION

February 13, 2020

We gathered here on this special night to remember where and how it all started and to hopefully think about where we are going. The point of reference of the “where” and the “how” is Ismene Phylactopoulou. We do not celebrate this special day to sanctify Ismene. We know today that Ismene is an example of female emancipation and a role model for young women.

Let me say a few words about Ismene and her life that perhaps our new colleagues have not had an opportunity to know. Ismene was a refugee from Smyrna. She and her family fled to Greece in late August 1922 to survive. Thanks to her resourcefulness, she managed to get a scholarship to study in the US at Wellesley College. She returned to her country as a Biology professor, met her husband, had a family, saw her husband leave for the German front in 1941 not knowing if he would come back, and spent the black years of the German Occupation with the rest of the Greeks, trying to survive by giving private lessons as teacher of English.

In the 50's she stood on her own two feet, and in the 60's she saw this incredible opportunity, a start-up, as we say today. CYA was born because her friends from the States were asking information on where to send their children to learn about Greece.

It was the time when our country was becoming a tourist destination for Americans. Ismene embarked on her venture daringly, taking risks. She had a business vision but being an educator herself, had no knowledge of business management. She had the luck to have next to her, her husband, Phyl, who was an experienced educational administrator and who reluctantly at first but with dedication later, offered invaluable help.

CYA was set up as a nonprofit organization, and as such gained credibility. She may not have had management knowledge, but she had a high EQ and the ability to choose the right associates. The attraction of famous scholars, such as HDF Kitto, and Robin Burns, enhanced the credibility of this new organization. Others followed: Kaiti Zikou, Nikos Yalouris, Tessa Dinsmoor, Judith Binder, Nikos Stavroulakis and so many others, such as Kimon Giocarinis, who could not be with us tonight.

Ismene loved her colleagues and I believe that her colleagues loved her too. There is a very special moment that I would like to share with you and I hope that Mimika (Dimitra), who is with us tonight, will not mind if I do. When Ismene passed away and

we all went to the cemetery in Kifissia quite early in the morning for the funeral, we found Mimika sitting right by her side. She had been there for quite some time.

In the years that followed, CYA grew, matured, became also DIKEMES, acquired its own buildings, and with its new rich curriculum, and excellent faculty members, it can now look into the future with great optimism.

CYA today has what it had back in 1962: great people that work with passion, with the feeling that CYA belongs to them because come to think of it, it does. CYA is its people, its faculty, its administration, its staff. Without them, without you, CYA is nothing.

We look forward to CYA's 60 years in 2022 with the belief that we serve an institution that offers so much not only to young people but to our country as well.