

On April 24th, my wife and I flew to Thessaloniki for a one-week vacation. We were thinking that we would make this trip maybe months later, but when we had the opportunity to take a long vacation from work and found a cheap ticket, we planned such a vacation. We wanted to come here because we wanted to visit these lands where our ancestors lived. Speaking of our ancestors, we wanted to visit our ancestors, not only those of Turkish origin, but also our ancestors who were Rum, who were migrated from the lands they had lived in for centuries with the exchange in 1924, to kiss their hands and listen to the stories they heard from their mothers and fathers. I was born in the town of Ovacik in Niğde also known as Semendire. Our village used to be a Greek village called Semendire. This is how it is mentioned in the Ottoman records. Then the Turks came and settled and lived together. The Rum church is still standing as a mosque in our village, and my parents even bought a stone house that was almost 150 years old, restored it and started to live there. The Rum families in our village were relocated to the village of Simantra with more than 2000 inhabitants in the Chalkidiki region of Greece with the exchange in 1924. They brought the bones of their 5 saints from the village of Semendire. They have turned this place into such a beautiful place to live that we were amazed. They even created a monument to commemorate the burials of the Muslims in the cemetery.

Before our journey to Simantra we contacted Vassilis. He has created a very nice website called sementre.gr which tells how the migration happened, the number of families who migrated, in short, their history and our history. We got his e-mail address from there. After we sent him an e-mail, he immediately said that he would be happy to host us.

After arriving in Thessaloniki, we rented a car and excitedly set off for Simantra. Obviously we were expecting a nice welcome. When we got out of the car, Vassilis was waiting for us with the 'grandfathers' of the village. Even this welcome was far above our expectations. They embraced us immediately and welcomed us. It was as if we knew them all. When we started chatting, we got closer because we were speaking in our mother tongue. We spoke Turkish with them without a translator between us. The grandfathers acted as translators between us and Vassilis. After a short conversation, Katerina joined us with her wonderful English and sympathy. After chatting a bit more, Vassilis started to show us around the village. First they showed us a ruined house where the Greeks stayed when they first arrived. Then we went to the graveyard and visited the burial place of the Turks. We were treated with respect and kindness, not forced, just compassion. Vassilis also told us that during the excavation for a building they found the bones of Karkara Muslims who had died many years ago and that they had stopped the excavation.

Afterwards they took us to their museum. The museum was identical in structure to the ruined house, but it was still standing. When I entered, I was greeted by the smell of my grandfather's house. When you enter old houses in our village, you smell the same smell because all the items in the museum were the same as in our Semendire. From plates and pots to knitting, lace, photographs, bedspreads, everything was the same. It was as if they were all produced in the same series in a factory, but we know that most of them were handmade. When I touched them, I went to Semendire. When I saw them, I was both sad and very happy. Yes, the exchange was perhaps a decision that should have been made according to the period, but this is not an issue we will discuss here. Because as a result of this decision, people had to migrate from their homeland, from their lands, leaving their homes, their belongings and only what they could take with them. Many people lost their lives. They suffered a lot of poverty.

On the other hand, I am happy because these beautiful people have not forgotten that. Vassilis has done a wonderful job and created a website. There is a wonderful museum. They reconstructed a 100 years old house there with all its belongings and when I, who had come from Semendire only 4 years ago, entered that house, it was like going back to my village. My wife was also very touched even though she had never been to Semendire. I always told her "one day we will go to my village. It is not very green, but it is still beautiful. My parents' house is very beautiful." It was as if I went to my village and showed it to my wife. I thank Simantra and most of all Vassilis for making this possible.

After visiting our time machine. Vassilis and Katerina took us to the olive oil factory owned by Katerina's cousin. In this family-owned factory, they told us how olive oil is made and what processes it goes through. They were all very kind people. At the end, they gave us enough small olive oil to take on the plane. We thank them for their kindness and the time they gave us.

Afterwards, we went to the olive factory near the village and the cheese factory opposite it, both owned by families from Simantra. They explained the processes to us in detail. They both buy their products from the farmers and animal breeders in the region and provide employment to the region. In short, they look after each other.

Afterwards we went back to the village. A magnificent table was prepared in the village local. Meze were coming to the table as they came. We ate our meals with a nice conversation. Of course, we talked a lot of good things during the meal. We talked about the fact that we were of the same blood, that my nose was Greek, that the fights of the politicians had no effect on our brotherhood, the day we spent there and many other things.

Afterwards, we said goodbye briefly and went to the beach with my wife and after siesta time we came back to the village and talked with the grandfathers for more than 2 hours. Since they were very friendly people, they knew us as their grandchildren and told us for a long time. Thanks to my wife, she took a lot of videos. We learned three or five words of Greek. We were very touched. Afterwards, we kissed their hands and headed back to Thessaloniki. Vassilis asked us when we got there; what do you want to see here? We said; we want to listen and visit the village. There was nothing else we wanted, but Vassilis made it a dream day for us. As if that wasn't enough, Katerina gave my wife a natural cream she made herself and Vassilis gave us vacuum-packed olives of his own production. We were very embarrassed to leave empty handed but we will come back again. This one day was better than all our vacations.

Vassilis, we are grateful to you for the care you showed to people you have never met. We were very happy to see and meet our, brothers, sisters and ancestors living there. Words are not enough to express our happiness. There are many things I am missing. Even though I am not able to explain, all of them have remained in our memories permanently. Because today is very different from yesterday. Every experience we go through changes us, but some experiences leave a lasting impression. Sometimes it is good and sometimes it is bad. Yesterday we renewed our hope in Simantra. Yesterday we were saying that we had a Greek grandmother, today we say Niko Amca, Dmitri Amca, Grigoris Amca(amca means uncle in Turkish) Vassilis abi(elder brother in Turkish). People who saw us for the first time in their lives showed us around as if we were the mayor even though we had no position or authority. The only response they expected was our satisfaction. Compared to yesterday, we are more hopeful, more attached to life. We love Greece more. We even want to learn Greek.

Again we would like to express our gratitude to these beautiful people

Thank you very much for your time and generosity.