

DUM SPIRO SPERO

by
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It was the 20th of July 1973, six o' clock in the morning, when a sudden noise was heard, waking us up. From the next-door house, a voice was heard from the radio saying: 'Kyrenia is being attacked. Turkish troops disembarked in the area of Pentamili, spreading fear and panic in the villagers with the constant bombarding of the area. Greek Cypriot troops cannot defend the island. Cyprus is being attacked.' Michael, my husband, told me to pack some necessary things for my son and me. While he was gathering thick branches to make weapons, he told me: 'Eleni, you must take our son away from here. I don't have time to explain, just take some things and go somewhere safe. Do as I say!' These were his last words. I packed some clothes for my son, whatever food I could find in the house, and some photographs. I took my son and left, leaving my husband behind. I had no choice; I had to be strong for Andreas, my son.

After walking and hiding for several days, we found an old man with his wife, who were willing to help us. 'Have you heard anything new about the situation?' I asked Panayiotis, the old man. 'Things are bad' he said 'we found a Greek Cypriot soldier and he told us that the Turkish aircrafts have been bombarding Nicosia for several days. That's all we know so far.'

Then...one day...six Turkish soldiers grabbed the old woman and me and threw us to the ground. Panayiotis was still sleeping inside the deserted house we were staying at. When he woke up from our screams, he ran outside the house and found us being kicked in the stomach by the soldier. 'Stop' he yelled at them 'let them go.'

I tried to escape but a soldier grabbed me and threw me to the ground. Panayiotis was striving to fight them with his two bare hands; but they were holding guns and hand-grenades. How could it be possible for the non-combatant people of Cyprus to go against the contemporary warlike resources of Turkey?

Andreas went to the door to see what was happening to me. The Turkish commander, who saw him, ordered one of his soldiers to grab my son. 'No, no, don't you dare touch him. Andrea run! Get away from here, run for God's sake, run!' But my dear boy could not move a muscle. The fear was holding his feet on the ground. Panayiotis ran to protect him, but before he could reach my son, the Turkish commander shot the old man. He shot him for trying to protect an innocent child. He shot an unarmed, old man in the heart; without hesitation or second thoughts. His soldiers were shouting: 'iyi pişmiş komutan' that is 'well-done commander'.

Panayiotis' wife, when she saw her husband being murdered and bleeding to death, fainted before she could say a word. I kept yelling to Andreas to run but it was hopeless. 'Do whatever you want with the women. The boy is coming with me', the commander ordered his soldiers. Before I could react, a soldier put a filthy piece of

cloth in my mouth and tied my hands behind my back. The commander left, taking my son with him.

I was thrown on the floor. The first soldier came and...and then left; and then the second one, and the third one, and the fourth one. They all came and left. When they were done with me, each one of them went to another room in the house, where they were holding the old woman.

I can say nothing else; it's too painful. You see, that is why it is so hard for me to talk about what happened back then. Killings, rapes, people taken as prisoners in Turkey, was a real situation in 1974. We were all persecuted and kicked out of our homes. Our husbands and sons were taken away; women were brutally raped. 1,619 Greek Cypriots are missing. Hundreds of women, mothers and wives, are still searching for their families. We want justice, we want our families back. I want my Andreas back. Even if he is dead, I want his body. I want to be able to bury him and cry over his grave, and light a candle for his soul. I want the priest to give him a decent funeral, as he deserves. I want my son, my Andreas, I want him back.

Some people, who hear our stories, may think that we are overreacting. They may believe that it is time to forget and continue with our new lives. They may say that we cannot do anything. But I tell you one thing. I wake up everyday and I'm obliged to see the Turkish flag illegally at Pentadaktilos. I'm obliged to see Pentadaktilos without being able to go there. Every single day I'm obliged to remember the massacre of our island. Every anniversary of the invasion, all the memories come back to me, and I re-live the barbarities and the killings. Every single day I hear my six-year-old son screaming, as the Turkish commander takes him away. Nobody cares. But we are still here, we are struggling, we are protesting, we are fighting.

Many people died for this country; people who never wanted to surrender; people who never feared to die for what they believed; heroes! We must never forget, we must never forget at least for their sake! For Pallikaridis and Afxentiou, for Drakos and Mavromatis, for Isaac and Solomou. For all the known and unknown heroes of this island. Can you imagine yourself not being able to go to the Akropolis in Athens? Can you imagine yourself being kicked out of Thessaloniki and never being able to come back again? Can you imagine yourself using a passport in order to visit a town in your own country? Can you?