

Dear Friends

Sometimes it is necessary to put politics to one side and just enjoy the fun that can unfold when an ex American president visits your peaceful paradise. Presidential visits were nothing new after living and working in London but how would Platania and its tiny handful of visitors react? We had no prior warning of the visit, but did notice a lot of Greek navy activity on Friday afternoon with 3 ships steaming up towards Skiathos and the Sporades.

Subconsciously, we (the crew of Kaliope) prepared for action. On Saturday morning as I crossed the 'aloni' an ancient threshing floor (that in the Randi contingency plans could double as a helipad) I saw what looked like a luxury cruise liner. It appeared to be delicately balanced on the chimney of the Randi Cottage. It was of course moored, just over a mile away outside Platania harbour.



We live, by the way, in a little hamlet above Platania called Randi, an amusing name to English speakers perhaps, but a word that has no meaning in Greek. In our first few years here when our Greek was limited, a sign that we were being recognised as locals would be when an old Greek man would come up to us, have a good look and ponder for a few seconds and then say 'Ahh Randi, Randi....'

The luxury cruise ship certainly represented a bit of potential excitement that might just perk up our visit to the village. As we climbed in the car we got a call from our friend Ullie, a journalist with a house by the harbour. 'Come and take a look', she said 'Bush Senior and guests are visiting Platania, a security frenzy is happening in our little harbour .....

Of course the secret and simple pleasures of Platania are normally only known to a few and whilst we always encourage and welcome visitors we prefer them to arrive discretely and experience the wonderfully simple and laid back way of life here without major disruptions to its routine.

Thus it occurred to us that we should welcome George Bush Sr and his party to our little hidden haven but respectfully suggest that to get the most out of it he should at least consider a more subtle approach. Therefore we could offer to put at his disposal the delightful facilities of the Randi Cottage (with Helipad!) for future reference and maybe a sail on Kaliope, ideally without naval escort!

Now for political balance you might think that we should extend our Ex US Presidential Special Randi Cottage Offer to Bill and Hilary, but we feel that would be one step too far. Can you imagine what would happen if the press got hold of that one...., headlines 'Randi - ex president visits the Randi Cottage'.... it doesn't bear thinking about, but George Bush Sr we think is OK.

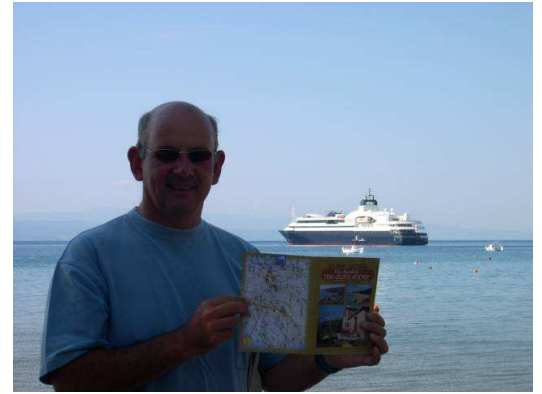


Meanwhile 5 minutes later we were down at the harbour side photographing exclusively for you all the fun.

For us the first problem was how to get the Randi Cottage leaflet to the Bush's luxury super yacht on which he is guest of Spiros Latsis, a Greek banking and shipping tycoon, ranked as 55th richest person in the world.

Kaliope was tucked up on her mooring. She was within the discreet security cordon so I could hardly paddle out to her on my surfboard, leaflets in hand and then approach the yacht. It would look far too suspicious. What I needed was some local assistance and know how.

In Platania we quickly found Jimmy, our friend and fisherman, farmer and boatman. We showed him the leaflet and discussed how to get the leaflet on board the Latsis yacht. Perhaps his father Nikos could help.



We had noticed the men in dark glasses looking unlike any tourist that Platania would usually attract.

Perhaps we should let them take a look at the Randi leaflet so they would realise that our intentions were honourable and would pose no threat.

But first a trial run. So off set Nikos to take up patrol of the 'inner cordon' around ship in his little yellow rowing boat. This worked perfectly. He attracted no attention from either the frigate offshore or the various RIBs containing police, coastguard, CIA??? who knows. The bottom line was they were having far too much fun whizzing around outside the harbour to think about approaches from the shore....



But Nikos with his rowing boat could take best part of an hour to get out to the yacht and he is in his 70's, he's hardly likely to have the breath to sneak aboard the yacht and deliver the Randi cottage leaflet to Mr Bush. So next we sent out Nikos on his bright red fishing boat for a dry run. If this does not attract unwanted attention from the security forces perhaps I can hop on board with Nikos and intercept the yacht in person. I'm sure I could adequately represent the common folk of Platania to welcome the Bush party and then quickly pass over the said leaflet.

So far so good. But for every great plan, there can be disadvantages. So here is a scenario for you to consider....

G Bush senior receives the Randi leaflet graciously and pops it in his suitcase for future reference. He takes it home. He sees his son. He tells George W that he has found a great little hideaway in the country, in Greece.. you know... that is near Turkey! Oh yeah... and that is near Iran and Iraq and all those places. Yup, and this Randi cottage is a great place and it has it's own helipad disguised as an old fashioned threshing floor. On the back of the leaflet is a map, with an arrow 'The Randi Cottage is here'....

Now is it or is not quite feasible that George W could quickly mix up his dad's recommendations for an away from it all holiday with his CIA security briefings intray. Suddenly the Randi cottage would no longer be the perfect holiday paradise, just the bombed out ruins of a suspected al quaida training camp, Bin Laden safe house..... Gosh, it doesn't bear thinking about....

So it was a good plan, but lets face it we are doing very nicely thank you, enjoying the company of friends and visitors and we really don't need to entertain ex presidents. We decided to shelve the plan, let them all do their thing and go for a sail when they leave.

We were about to head home for breakfast when we saw a large RIB (inflatable boat) leaving the yacht and heading for the harbour. The ex presidential party was coming ashore. We took up station by the bridge and saw a group of security officials (sort of dressed as tourists) discussing we presumed how to get ex presidential party past Spiros taverna without being hassled to stop for 37 full breakfasts. This Spiro is not the 55th richest man in the world but he would like to be.

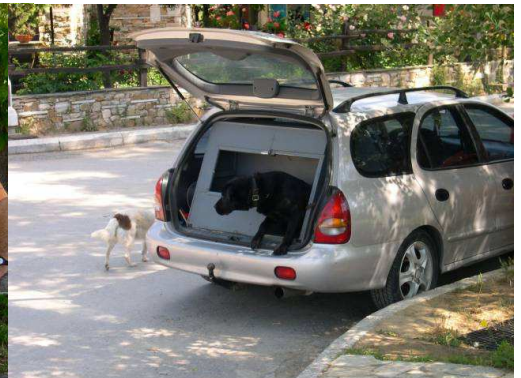


A crowd of locals (Katerina, Thomas, Nikos and I) assembled to watch the goings on and to see if a Spiros taverna 'diversionary plan' can be pulled off by the combined Greek and US security forces.

Although the security measures seemed to be reasonable to the casual observer, it was not too difficult for a trained eye to see some gaps in the plan. Certainly the police dog was looking quite bored with the lack of action but was

amusing itself by checking out the local doggy talent!!

With the Bush party finally ashore and assembled by the harbour wall, even I had to admit that it looked like it was going smoothly. The security detail was starting to relax believing the lack of any demonstrators, weirdo's



or terrorists was going to give them an easy ride today. The presidential party was ready to set off for a hike from the harbour and the Spiros diversionary plan appeared to be a simple and effective classic strategy.... to walk past en mass, at a fast pace keeping a fixed look ahead to avoid eye contact with Spiro.....

Of course, although this tactic may well upset the locals, it is a classic example of big VIP visits. The objective of the principle to meet the locals, is overridden by the plans of the protection unit, who rate upsetting the villagers as minor a inconvenience. They have their own agenda, to go for a walk, keep the principles safe and anyway they have clearly already had a sumptuous breakfast aboard their luxury super yacht.

Enter the scene, Anastasias (aged 20 months) arriving in his push chair with his Grandma. This young boy, the son of Michalis and Tania from the Taverna Remetzo, arrives not only to see the action but decides to hold a demonstration in front of the police car at the precise moment the Spiros diversionary plan is being put into action.

The following moments captured exclusively with my camera had the crowd of local on lookers holding their breath in anticipation. It flummoxed the local police escort and (presumably) the CIA security and protection detail. They had no counter tactic to deal with this



demonstration as the Bush party were now walking off from the harbour wall towards us. The party had gathered pace and had already passed 'Tsiperou alley' the only diversionary escape route to avoid Spiros taverna. Any police or CIA intervention at this time would cause a delay and halt the presidential party precisely at Spiros door.....

To readers who know the geography of Platania's water front you will no doubt be following this story exactly, to others we shall be happy to reenact what took place next should you ever visit us here.....



So with the ex president, his extended family, Greek police escort and CIA security detail charging along the harbour front at a pace never before witnessed by locals, Anastasias demands grandma to stop the pushchair in front of the police car. Then as cool as a cucumber he alights from his buggy and prepares the demonstration.

He produces his smart yellow and orange plastic digger, of which he is immensely proud. He then started to demonstrate exactly how the big shovel can

articulate and thus how the real diggers cleared all the mud from the harbour following last October's floods, which Anastasias used to watch every day and is why when he grows up he wants to be a digger driver!!! (Phew!)

Immediate action was needed to avoid a potential catastrophe. The police, CIA and everyone else appeared flummoxed, there was simply no contingency to deal with such a demonstration.

It is at moments like these that years spent with the Metropolitan Police really pays off. The ability to form and execute an

emergency resolution plan in a split second having recognised a serious potential sequence of events about to unfold and to do so without creating alarm or international embarrassment is something you always like to keep tucked away for moments such as these.

I'm sorry about the lengthy build up, but I need not speculate what an ugly scene or tragic outcome could have unfolded here on the Platania sea front yesterday morning with the CIA and Greek Police faced with a sudden unforeseen scenario and with the presidential party hurtling like a human tsunami, towards the Anastasias' road block...

So with a calm, cool and cheery voice I called out to Anastasia 'Oh, bravo Anastasias, ti oraia tsapa, ella etho pedthi mou' ( oh well done Anastasias, what a lovely digger, come here and show it to me!)

Anastasias looked up smiled and toddled over to us with his digger and grandma (understandably unaware of the situation unfolding) followed. Looks of alarm and bewilderment on the faces of the police and CIA heading up the ex presidents group of charging hikers suddenly relaxed. Poor Spiro came running out to the front of his Taverna to greet a group of strolling visitors with his customary ' Ello, ow are djou? Yees, nice, ave a nice day, you want some feesh, I av, very nice.'

Poor Spiro, before he had said 'Ello, ow.....' the entire ex presidential party complete with it's international security force, had swept past Spiro's (all 37 of them). They whizzed past the crowd of on lookers, now 6 including Anastasias and his Grandma.

So with all this going on all I had time to do was take all the photos, recognise a serious breach of security and devise and implement a resolution plan and .....

And so I only just had time to say to Mr George Bush Sr. 'Good morning sir, I'm just taking your photograph...'  
and he replied 'Oh great, did you get it ok?' 'Yes thank you and have a nice day' and his final words were 'thanks you bet we will'..... and they were gone. Around the corner past the bakery and off up the road towards Randi.....

Oh no, I had meant to stop them and at least to say to him, look Mr Bush this really is not the best way to visit places like this. You really should consider next time the Randi approach. You can land your helicopter on the Aloni or better still Stamouli will pick you up in his water taxi and we can hike up the kalderimi. Then no one will know you are here and you can actually enjoy your self so much more. I wondered where they were headed. They did not follow our hiking signs and take the old donkey path to Promyri or Lafkos. They would have enjoyed it but of course you can't get a Greek police car up the footpaths or across the streams or through the olive groves.



So we headed off home for breakfast. We came up behind the Bush party further up the road still steaming ahead like an express train. They walked via the tarmac all the way to Kastri beach a nightmare of a walk on a hot day steeply up hill and down again.... If only they had taken the delightful footpath..... All in a days work for the crew of Kaliopé!

Now 24 hours later life has returned to normal, and Randi and Platanias will welcome you all. You will have more fun if you are not an ex president, but then again the locals will have more fun if you are..... except for poor Spiros perhaps.



Best wishes to you all

Chris and Kathryn

p.s. apologies to Spiros taverna and for all the other bits I made up but it was fun.....

p.p.s I'm sorry if Kaliopé did not feature much in the story, but she was there and enjoyed the fun!