

They literally both looked at us as if we'd each just grown an extra head, after which they explained that there was no one there on this day that could assist with that task. When we asked if they had some sort of cart or other means by which to take our luggage up, we received the same look and were simply told "no." Needless to say, we were all a bit flabbergasted, since we had received such excellent service from every single person we'd met up to this point!! So, we all took turns either hauling luggage into the elevator or standing guard in the lobby with the remaining luggage until, at last, it was all in our rooms. We were not happy.

The one saving grace of this hotel was the great rooftop bar, just one floor above us. The bartenders were outstanding, the drinks were very good, and there was a wonderful view of the busy harbor below, full of boats of every shape and size.



That night, Darren and I went out to dinner with Ilias and Ioulia again, although Don and Carolyn opted to stay in and get some much-needed rest. We met them in the lobby, where they showered us with gifts, both for us and for Don and Carolyn. This is a common Greek tradition...we brought gifts for them from America, so of course they had to give us some back! Mental note: we'll need to buy more luggage tomorrow!!!

After taking our new bounty back up to our room, and delivering Don & Carolyn's to them, the four of us hopped in Ilias' car and took off in search of a good local "estiatorio," or restaurant. The streets of Piraeus were full of honking cars and people yelling things at each other, singing and making general party noises. Ilias explained that this was due to the fact that the "Olympiacos," one of Greece's top football (soccer) teams, had won the Greek Cup in the final round of the playoffs earlier in the week, and everybody was out celebrating! They had won the World Championship in 2004 in Portugal, but sadly went on to lose it this year to Australia, 1-0!! The Greeks take their sports very seriously, and Ilias told me that his son (or maybe son-in-law) wasn't currently speaking to him, because he was a fan of the opposing Greek team, who had lost to the Olympiacos!

We eventually ended up at a great little place and had another fantastic meal and more ouzo! For a person that doesn't really drink much alcohol, I amazed myself with the amount of ouzo I consumed while in Greece. But it's just so good!!! As usual, we ordered way too much food and ended up taking some back to the hotel with us in a doggie bag (which Darren and I call a "skilosakoula").

Monday, May 15

The next morning, we wondered why we had done this and when we thought we were going to eat it, but then decided we would take it down to a couple of neighborhood stray dogs we'd seen earlier and give them a special treat! The poor things gobbled it up, which added to my "list of things that made me cry in Greece!"

Remember my mental note a couple of paragraphs ago about having to buy more luggage? I was serious. Carolyn and I decided we had to figure out a way to go shop for some before getting ready to fly to Lesvos later that day. So we hailed a cab in front of the hotel, something we discovered is very easy to do in Greece, and were delighted to discover that the cab driver was not only friendly, like most Greeks, but knew exactly where the best deals in town for luggage were. He even told us what floor and against which wall we would find it, and dropped us off right in front of the department store! We had our luggage purchased (a 3-piece set for 35 euro!) and were back at our hotel in less than an hour! This excursion was added to our list of “things that make you say Wow!”

There was no way we were going to fit the four of us plus all that luggage into one cab, and we were quoted some ridiculous price to hire two separate cabs, so I promptly got on the phone with trusty Nick II, and he arranged to have two of his drivers pick us up to take us to the Athens Airport for half the price we were previously quoted! Darren, Don and Carolyn rode in one cab, and I rode in the other, along with most of the luggage, and had yet another wonderful conversation, in Greek, with my driver! We talked about many things, but one thing really stands out in my mind. He had recently taken his first trip to America to visit his sister in Boston. He told me that one of the most prominent things he noticed about Americans was their obsession with making money. He felt that you lose out on the real pleasures in life when your main focus and purpose is accumulating more and more of the green stuff. I loved his philosophy: “Of course you need to have enough money to pay your bills and have some amenities in life, but it doesn’t take that much of it to enjoy life’s true pleasures...watching a sunset with someone you love, going to the park with your children, smelling a flower or having a great cup of coffee.” Basically, in Greek, what he said was, “Do what you love, and the money will follow.” I’m always going to hold on to those words! Yep, it’s time to simplify your life, Helen...get rid of some of the clutter!

Our flight on Aegean Airlines from Athens to Mytilene was short and pleasant. We no sooner got to cruising altitude, when the plane started its final descent, since it was only a 50-minute flight. When we got off the plane in Mytilene, with the most perfect weather you could possibly wish for and the Aegean Sea lapping deliciously on the shore just across the road, Carolyn and I looked at each other and knew we were finally in Paradise!! I realize I haven’t done a lot of traveling in my life and that I don’t have much experience with airports around the U.S., let alone around the world, but I have to say the Mytilene Airport is my favorite one so far! It’s quite small, everyone there was friendly (are you listening JFK and Charles DeGaulle?), and it’s right across the road from the Aegean Sea, for crying out loud!! We walked from the plane to the baggage claim, got a couple of big carts for our luggage, for no charge, I might add, and when we walked to the front of the airport, our driver was waiting for us with a sign and our rental car! He had brought his own van, since we had told him there was no way the four of us and all of our luggage would fit into the Hyundai Elantra we had rented. We followed Stratis from the airport, through the town of Mytilene, and on to the Mytilana Village Resort.

When we drove onto the property of the resort, Carolyn said, “this place looks even better than the website pictures!”



We couldn't believe our eyes as we took in the beauty of the grounds and the fact that the resort was located right on the crystal blue waters of the Gulf of Gera, which is part of the Aegean Sea.





As we parked the Hyundai under the cool shade of an olive tree, we were greeted by Maria and her beautiful smile. She and Stratis hugged (it seemed everyone knew each other!) and Maria turned to us and said, “Eleni, we’re so glad you are finally here!” and gave me one of her great hugs, too! She welcomed all of us and immediately started helping us unload and carry our luggage up to our rooms.

These were located on the second floor and we fell in love with them! From our front balconies, we looked down at the many rose bushes and other flowers that graced the grounds.



But when we walked out to the back balconies, it took our breath away! We could see all the way down to the beach and could actually see and hear the water softly lapping on the shore!

We knew we truly were in paradise!!



Maria and Helen



View from our back balcony

There were actually a few little drawbacks, which I will describe here, but they were minor and really did not adversely affect our stay. The first thing we noticed was that there were no shower curtains. When Carolyn asked me about that, I assumed it was because the bathrooms were made completely out of marble (beautiful!) and there was a drain hole in the floor, making it okay to get the floor wet. However, on our fourth day there, after returning from an outing, the shower curtains had magically appeared hanging around the tub! Things that make you go “Huh!”

The other drawbacks were both due to the fact that the tourist season had not yet started and the four of us were joined by only maybe 3 or 4 other people the entire six days we were there...the pool wasn't filled, and the kitchen was not open, which meant they weren't yet serving dinners at the resort. We all agreed that these were small prices to pay for having the resort, and the attention of Maria and Stella, all to ourselves!



Empty pool right below our rooms!



Stella

After all, the beach, complete with chaises and umbrellas, was only a few feet away, and we took advantage of that all but one day of our stay!



“Our” beach on the Gulf of Gera

The dinner situation was quickly remedied when Maria told us about the “O Loukoulos” taverna, only a short drive away. She said that the owner’s wife, Melina, was a friend of hers and that they served great food. She was right! We ended up eating there three of the six nights we were on the island, and it was awesome! The first night, Don ordered his favorite drink, a Screwdriver but, unfortunately, George (the owner) didn’t have any vodka on hand.



Melina and George, owners of O Loukoulos

However, the second time we went, two days later, he had the vodka and OJ ready, without even knowing for sure if we'd be returning! Now that's service!!



This was an absolutely charming little place, right on the water in a little village called Dipi, also on the Gulf of Gera.

We quickly discovered that, because the tourist season had not yet begun, at most of the restaurants and tavernas on the island the menu was of little or no value. They would bring one out, but then they would quickly add, in Greek, "Let me tell you what we have today." As in the case of "O

Loukoulos," most of these places specialized in freshly caught seafood, usually either grilled over coals, or fried in olive oil. But there was always plenty of Greek salad, lots of freshly baked bread, tzaziki (a yogurt/cucumber sauce), and fries. It seemed that most of the places on the island served fries with everything, and they were all the best fries any of us had ever tasted!! We were also usually able to order any type of grilled or fried meats, but some of the other specialties, like stuffed grape leaves, pastichio and mousaka, were a little harder to find this early in the year.

Don't get me wrong...we were never at a loss as to what to order and we rarely were served anything that we didn't all find very delicious! One of the appetizers that we especially loved was saganaki, or fried cheese. This was usually made with kefalotiri, or as I like to call it, "the other Greek cheese." It makes my mouth water just remembering how wonderful it tasted! And funny thing...ouzo went so well with everything we ever ordered!!



Tuesday, May 16

This morning we decided we'd better drive into town and find a Laundromat. The hotels in Athens charged ridiculous prices to do your laundry, so we had all accumulated quite a bit of it and were almost running out of things to wear. We packed it all up into a couple of suitcases and went on our quest. Although Darren had assumed I would do all of the driving while in Lesvos, I told him there was no reason why he couldn't drive and let me read the signs, so that's what we did. There was massive road construction taking place right in front of our resort on the road into town, and he easily navigated around most of the potholes and construction barriers. However, as soon as we got into town, he promptly went the wrong way down a one-way street and we soon had the locals wildly gesturing to us to go back! It was a quick (and somewhat scary) lesson in reading a Greek one-way sign, so that was the one and only time that happened. However, it was enough to make Darren decide that I would do all the future driving!

I looked in my trusty Greek-English dictionary for the word "Laundromat" and stopped to ask a little old lady if she knew where we might find one. She was very puzzled by this, as I'm sure she probably never used one a day in her life! She asked a neighbor, who told us she thought there was one somewhere in town...more of those vague Greek directions! We thanked them and drove on, not really knowing where we were headed! After we'd driven a ways, we saw a group of younger people walking along the street and stopped to ask them the same question. They told us they thought there was one a couple of corners down, so we stopped and walked down to where they had directed us, only to find that the place had closed some time ago. Back to the car and more aimless driving.

Suddenly, I spotted a sign that said "Plintirio"...bingo!! We couldn't believe the luck! We found a place to park, which in itself was a challenge, and started walking back to the plintirio, lugging the rolling suitcases full of dirty laundry behind us. We really must have been a sight to behold!! We walked in and found a man and woman in there, who we thought were just more customers...wrong! Apparently, in Mytilene anyway, they do your laundry for you! I spoke to the gentleman and discovered that he and his wife ran the place and he explained that they had several loads to complete before ours, but that they should be ready for us by that evening. He handed us some large bags and asked us to sort our clothes the way we normally would, and said that the cost was six euro per full bag! Wow! In Athens, they charged \$8.50 for one blouse!! He asked where we were from and I explained our story, including the fact that my mom had grown up in this town, in the neighborhood called "Chrysomalousa," or "Goldenhair." Unbelievably, that was the very neighborhood this Laundromat happened to be in!! When we told him that we were staying at the Mytilana Village in Gera, he insisted on delivering our clothes to us when they were ready, and said he would not charge us the one euro delivery charge!! We ended up with a total of six full bags, so the charge was 36 euro, and they refused to accept any tip!! We all just kept pinching ourselves to make sure we weren't all having the same wonderful dream! Throughout our stay in Mytilene, we discovered over and over again just how kind and honest the people there were.

We left the Laundromat and decided to walk around a little and explore my mom's old neighborhood. We discovered that most of the residential areas had been converted to businesses, but on my next visit there, I intend to find out exactly which

house my mom grew up in. We stopped in a little store for some drinks and snacks to take back to the hotel, then found a little liquor store where I bought four bottles of ouzo to take back home. Everywhere we went it was the same story...people would ask where we were from. (Apparently, it was very obvious to everyone that we weren't locals!) And each time, they marveled at how well I spoke Greek, considering this was my first trip to Greece, and I would explain the whole story about it being my first language, speaking it at home all my life, and going to Greek school for 8 years! Again, I wasn't sure if this simply impressed the heck out of them, or if they were all just very sweet and warm-hearted people, because they all treated us very well and with so much kindness!

It was still too early for dinner when we returned to the hotel, so we decided it was BEACH TIME!! Although this was our first time on the beach, all subsequent times were the same...we were always the only ones there! We couldn't imagine what that and the outside dining/dancing area must look like at the height of the tourist season!



Darren and Don kickin' it on the beach

Imagine having to get to the beach early in order to grab a chaise, let alone one with an umbrella. Instead, we would just walk down there and decide which one we wanted to sit/lie in that day! Darren was always the only one brave enough to dive into the still cool water, especially after we dared him to!



Are you daring me????



See ya, chickens!



Still the King!



I'll wait this one out!



Me, too!



We did eventually wade in!

After we got back to our rooms, we went out to our balcony and saw that there was another lady staying in the room next to ours. She had vibrantly red hair and fair skin and greeted us in English, with a German accent. We discovered her name was Elke and that she was traveling alone, so we invited her to join us for dinner that evening. We stopped at another taverna that we had seen the night before, not far from O Loukoulos (I never did find out what that means, by the way!) The girl that brought us our water and “pretend” menus (because again they only were serving a few of the items on it) spoke English without an accent. When I asked about that, she told us she had grown up in Canada, although she had lived on this island for the past eight years, after having married a Mytilene native. She was also the owner of this taverna and had two adorable little girls who would come out into the courtyard where we sat and would just giggle! She told them in Greek to go back in and get ready for bed, but they were still up and giggling an hour later when we got up to leave! When we returned to the Mytilana, we all went into the bar and had a few more drinks and pistachios before we all said goodnight and went to bed.



Carolyn & Darren that night at the Mytilana bar

Wednesday, May 17

Darren got a hold of George at Lesvos Scuba, so we headed into town again to try to find the scuba shop and maybe do some shopping while there. We parked the Hyundai in the huge, FREE, public parking lot that runs along the Port of Mytilene, and realized how spoiled we were getting and will hate returning to the sky-high prices of everything back home!



The Public Parking Lot at the Mytilene Port



Carolyn, Don & Darren with our rental



The weather is once again perfect as we stroll along the waterfront of the beautiful Aegean, and I remember my mom telling me how much she used to love walking on this very route in the 1940's on her way to work, at the now long-gone textile factory. This made me feel such deep sorrow for her, that she had to leave this beautiful place and move to a foreign country, to marry a man she didn't know, and to live in a town like Gary, Indiana, where the winters were brutal and the summers hot and sticky. But when I

mentioned this to some of the locals, they all assured me that this was a very different place in 1947, when my mom left. It was a poor, war-ravaged country and life here was very hard. Still, she was never able to return before she died, and I found myself hoping very hard that she was there with me now.

We knew the scuba shop was on Agia Irini (St. Irene) Street, so we asked a passerby and were told that it was over behind Agia Irinis Park, near where we had parked. We crossed Ermou Street, the busy main thoroughfare of Mytilene, and walked back in that direction until we found the street, and then looked for Number 3, which was only a few steps further.



After introducing ourselves to George (another Greek cutie) and the others in the shop, Carolyn and I arranged to meet the guys back there in about 1 1/2 hours. When George heard we were planning to do some shopping, he informed us that, because it was Wednesday, all the stores had already closed for the day, except for the super markets and a few smaller shops. We decided to go anyway, even if it was just for window-shopping, and took off toward the nearest ATM machine (just in case). George was right...EVERYTHING was closed!! But we made a mental note of some of the more interesting looking shops and decided we would have to make at least one more trip into town that week to complete our shopping!



As we walked along (for miles, it seemed), we did come upon a small "quickie-mart" type store and ducked inside, in hopes of at least finding some local olive oil. The store was run by a sweet little yiayia who didn't know a stick of English, and who was very happy to hear me speaking to her in Greek. After talking with her for a while, she told me that she wished some of