



Courage is Contagious

Yogurt throwing? Pepper spray? Impromptu singing? Cars on fire? Dancing in the streets? Angry protestors? A dejected people?

My imagination soared as we rode along the idyllic Ethniki Odos highway from Patras to Athens Greece the afternoon of July 5th, 2015. After being an unwilling victim, albeit a mirthful one, to a myriad of protests, rallies, strikes, and other various expressions of discontent by the Greeks on my past visits, I was giddy with anticipation.

Just one day after my friends and family back home were celebrating my birth nation's founding, I would be witnessing – no PARTICIPATING – in Greece's courageous decision concerning their continued involvement in one of the most influential unions in modern history. By my estimation, both sides were courageous. It was clear from the attitude upon arriving in Greece that it was not the politicians whose voices were to be heard, but instead those of the Greek people, from the horio to the polis.

Prior to our arrival in the nation's capital, the people we had heard discussing the vote had been joyous – if for no other reason than that they would have a majority voice with which to present their answer to the world. We are Greece, and This is what WE think.....

My shock was nearly palpable when our journey was unabated by all manner of transportation in various states of disregard and disrepair, and ended with the unbelievable ample parking directly in front of our hostel. Athens was eerily quiet as it collectively held its breath. Seemingly all action in this perpetually frenzied city was suspended during the long hour and a half wait for the vote tally. At that point, the people's energy was calm with a healthy side of anticipation.

By 8pm we had entered a fragrant, hot, and activated scene in Syntagma square. A Greek flag flapped in our faces with every step as we meandered through the hustling street vendors, joyous participants, and curious spectators. We watched a 5-year-old Greek boy dressed in his nicest Evzone costume do his best proud-warrior impression while his parents took his picture with the guards at the tomb of the unknown soldier.

We watched Yiayiades (grandmothers) find and kiss their younger-family members in the euphoric crowd before dragging them into an impromptu zembekiko dance. We watched bands, and singing, and speeches, and dancing, and fist pumping, and clapping, and for all the portend that this vote held, if not to the EU in any official capacity but to the attitudes of the people, there was nary a hint of trepidation. We are Greece, and we are boldly pressing on....

“Talk of Spain leaving the EU is escalating because of the Greek vote,” I overheard a newly arrived Spaniard to his Chinese girlfriend in the Montreal airport on my way back to the States.

“One can only say ‘yes’ and bow in supplication so many times before one finds oneself completely prostrate on the ground with nothing of one’s own. But when one boldly proclaims ‘no!’ they rise straight and tall off the ground with their fist in the air with the courage that the pride in their conviction supplies them,” said a Frenchwoman at our hostel in Athens.

Times are changing, nations are stirring, and the Greeks are once again setting an example for the evolution that many have predicted, and some have feared, for years. No matter your political or economic beliefs, the Greek people brazenly, and with full and courageous hearts, rose up and shouted OXI (NO)! They proclaimed it unapologetically, with joy in their souls, fountains underneath their dancing feet, and flags waved with frenetic energy.

As we watched Syntagma square fill, boom, and then dissipate over the next 6 hours, I couldn’t help but feel hopeful. Not necessarily because Greece was on the way up, but because it was on its way toward a new and uncharted future about which the people were excited. And that’s really something all things considered.



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