

Kytherian Jigsaw

By Vikki Vrettos Fraioli with Terry Chlentzos Keramaris

As a young child, I remember my mother telling me stories of my yiayia and papou who had immigrated in the early 1900s from Kythera – via Alexandria, Egypt – to the United States. Spellbound, I listened to the tale of my grandmother's shipboard voyage to America, traveling alone, toting two small children. My papou was the first to make the journey in 1906, and almost a year later, my yiayia followed him. Like many others, Yiannis and Maria Alfieris were seeking a better life in a new land. I'm in awe of these brave immigrants who made this journey, my grandparents among them. What courage and determination they must have had to make a voyage to an unknown land with little money and few possessions. What they did have was a dream for a better life and the determination to make it happen.

Stories like these piqued my interest in my family's history. One of my fondest memories as a young child visiting Yiayia and Papou's house was looking through their old photo albums. The older I got the more intrigued I became with these vintage photographs.

In my research, I discovered that Yiannis and Maria were not the first in the family to venture to America. Maria's brothers, Diamantis and Panayiotis Chlentzos, made the journey as early as 1898. Through the Kythera-family.net message board Terry Chlentzos-Keramaris and I discovered that our grandparents were siblings. Terry's Papou, Diamantis Chlentzos, was Yiayia's brother, making Terry and me second cousins. We soon discovered that we also shared a passion for family history and genealogy.

Terry and I met for the first time in 2005 at the Kytherian Society Luncheon in Oakland, California. At the luncheon Terry shared her detailed Chlentzos-Couliantianos family tree, which was compiled in 1935 by her Uncle Peter Clentzos. That meeting and the family tree sparked the idea to research and expand the existing family tree for the Chlentzos, Couliantianos and Alfieris families. We were fortunate to have a good start with Uncle Pete's family tree.

Terry and I work as a team. We collaborate for hours online using a Voice-Over-IP program called SKYPE (www.skype.com) as we surf the web for information about our Kytherian ancestors. We scour the Internet, utilizing Google and other search engines, Ancestry.com, EllisIsland.org, the Australian Ryerson index and Kythera-family.net. Out of necessity we have also become astute genealogical detectives. The close-knit Kytherian family trees have intertwining branches, and we find that many families are connected.

We've located Chlentzos families in California, Washington, Arizona, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Maryland, Australia and Greece; Couliantianos relatives in South Africa, France, Australia and Greece; and Alfieris families in Australia, Spain, the UK and Greece. We correspond with these long-lost family members by email and telephone.

Wanting to share our newfound knowledge and hoping to connect with other relatives and Kytherians, I created a website called Kythera Connections (<http://homepage.mac.com/vikvf/KytheraConnections/Menu62.html>). I update the site frequently with vintage photographs, expanded family tree charts and digital audio/video interviews featuring local Kytherians.



This picture was taken approximately 1912 in Oakland, California. On the right is Yanoula Couliantianos Chlentzos (1886-1984). To her left is her husband Diamantis Chlentzos (1874-1969). In front of them are 4 of their children. In the front middle is Panayiotis Chlentzos. In back with the mandolin is his son Angelo (1895-1982). The woman on the left is Maria Chlentzos Alfieris (1883-1968) with daughters Florence and Alice to the left; Gus behind her; and Lula with the white headband.

Three videos feature 99-year old Stamatoula Mavromatis Chlentzos of San Jose, California, describing the vintage photographs in her collection and sharing her childhood memories of Kythera. A fourth video highlights 96-year old Uncle Pete Clentzos in Palm Springs, California, while he was recuperating from hip surgery.

Working on the family tree has given Terry and me even more opportunities to gain knowledge. Terry's interest in genealogy has led her to visit research libraries and look up Kytherian family history records. I'm building a digital photo archive of many vintage photographs, slowly identifying the people in them and recording the stories behind them. Bit by bit, the pieces to the massive jigsaw are coming together to reveal an intricate puzzle.

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