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His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

Love and compassion are necessities not luxury



The world fell in love with the touching movie in 2002, it was *My big fat Greek wedding*. Relationship of the beautiful Maria Portacalos and John Corbet's characters seemed to be a reflection of a real idea of love, romance and attitude towards family, yet, with the trace of a fairytale spirit: don't we all know that a 'happy ever after' exists just in movies and books? 'You don't', tells our new columnist, co-owner of Elounda SA Hotels & Resorts, Ilias Kokotos, showing us a true story of love.

Ilias Kokotos

Love is all around

We are quite a big family. I have an elder brother. My mother took care of us and my father worked much. Then five years later my sister was born. I remember the main thing in my childhood, it was freedom. I think that is why we feel safe and sure of ourselves in this world. Parents trusted us and that was their way to love us. They were there for us, protecting, guiding and taking care, we spent a lot of quality time together. But there was no "Stop, don't do that" in our relationship. We ran, fell down and learnt by hitting ourselves. When you stand up by yourself after falling you learn to do it in your future life. We had a lot of choices, big area to run around and have fun, and they encouraged us instead of scaring about the risks, that would have made us be insecure. We would go to the beach, swim in the sea, run around. I did it alone, with my brother and sister, with children from the hotel. All summer days were relaxing, happy, free of responsibility and now I recall them all as if it was a single lovely moment of my life. Being happy and free as a child is a feeling I remember and miss so much as an adult.

I strongly believe that real love in every kind of relationship, mother, husband, woman, wife means being happy with the happiness of the other person. Well, as a human being you will always care about someone else. But

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the difficult thing is to be happy with the happiness of the others and for me real love is when you smile and someone smiles in response.

In sixties or seventies of the last century families in Greece agreed about marriages but it doesn't happen any more and people fall in love and make their choices. Of course with every country or family the story is the same: we want kids to meet a rich wife or husband and live in wealth and happiness. It might be a wish at the beginning but at the end it's always a choice. People get married here as everywhere else in the world. I have six nieces and one nephew and if I see them happy I'd accept any of their choices. I love them and their happiness is the most important thing for me. Only in case if I see them happy I feel peace in my heart.

Love is something that should be an attitude. In all spheres of our life. Taken as an example, Elounda SA Hotels & Resorts is one of the most popular among others. And what makes it be so is our philosophy. Love for people. We are the first in our area who decided to make a private swimming pool for every room. And to go further, every villa in Elounda Peninsula Hotel has its own private access to a separate peace of the beach.

Love for the nature is our second pillar. My father respects environment and loves nature. This year we have a very big renovation of the pool area of resort. Elounda Peninsula has the largest pool of all the resort. My father is an architect and he is an active eighty-six years old person: I brought drawings to him for approval. There were some trees that we took out for this renovation but Carrot trees cannot be replanted. He said "No. You would change the plans and make pool around the Carrot trees, we won't take them off. You have to respect them and they should be safe there, they shouldn't die". And we made

the pool the way he wanted: it is around the trees. I think people who come here understand our love and respect for the nature. May be this is what makes us different, out of standards as in many other hotels where owners buy mirrors and things from the same producer and they all look alike in many aspects. Here we have put our souls in every detail due to my father and his conceptual vision. My brother's PDA in US was about the ways to save and produce energy in ecological way for the same reason. We were the first company in Greece who made everything possible to protect environment. And this is also a love matter, to respect nature means to survive and let live.

The biggest love story for me is the one of my parents'. It is the ideal story, the best I've ever seen. My mother's father had a hotel in Crete. She was sixteen and my father was in his thirties, already an architect. Her father invited him to renovate the hotel. My father saw the girl and immediately fell in love with her. It was like a lightening in a storm. She was too young and of course he didn't even dare to share his feelings with her. But he gave a word to himself to be with her one day. In four years her father died, she felt lonely being a single child. She was twenty, studying in London and didn't know what to do with the hotel she inherited from her father. She asked my father to help her about selling the hotel as he was in this business and knew the ways. They started to go out together. She had land in Elounda so they decided to start this business together.

They are together for 50 years now. He is still an architect and my mother is a business woman, she is running the resort. This love story created the hotels, my father was building and my mother was operating. Creation started from the Elounda Mare in 1982, when I went to school being seven, she said, 'I am not staying at home anymore, enough of housewife career I start working'. My father was building hotels for other people at that time. But that year they made Elounda Mare and you can see and feel how much love is put into every small detail. It was their first child in business made together. And then they made Porto Elounda and Elounda Peninsula together and every time it was something different: three kids, three hotels. The way they work together was amazing.

When we were kids we lived on the peninsula and every Monday morning they took us all in Monday to the school, flew back to Crete and go to take us back on Thursday and we went for dinner all together at night. But they were always together, they would never separate: they went skiing in February with or without us but the two of them were always together. Singing, working, traveling. People say that it is bad for a couple to work together but I look at them and it is like magic, one piece of a puzzle fits another one hundred percent. My father has a vision as an architect, artistic view, always being the first in his professional world like Archimedes was the world's first with his screw machine. He was the first in the private room pools and villas' access to the sea story. And I am sure that this wouldn't have been possible if not for his muse and partner, his wife. If you are an artistic person like my father you are usually not well organized. Your mind is always traveling. My mother was an operating person. Her mind was always there in business. So it was a perfect combination in everything, personal, private, professional and social life. And of course we saw them happy, laughing a lot, sharing ideas, telling jokes.

If you really love someone you must be happy when she or he is happy. In another words you will understand that you love someone when you smile when he or she smiles. Do not overanalyze, put your ego a bit down, let it go the way it goes and you'll see your happy ever after.