

Spartan village inspires Demas

By Jae-Ha Kim
Tribune Content Agency

Some people dream of quitting their job and enjoying the quiet life. Not Leonidas G. Demas. After he retired from his career as an attorney, he pursued his passion for filmmaking. Demas wrote a script for the film "A Spartan Dream," which was filmed entirely in Greece.

"Over the years, I had developed a love for Greece, visiting many times from childhood to the present," said Demas, 78. "(I was) particularly focused on a small village in the Spartan countryside known as Amyklai. These were the experiences from which 'A Spartan Dream' is derived."

This interview with Demas has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Where are some of the places you filmed "A Spartan Dream"?

A: Actually, the entire film was filmed in Greece and 90% was filmed in and around the modern town of Sparta. We also filmed in the seaside town of Gytheion, which in ancient times was the port for Sparta and is about 25 minutes by car to the south. Xirokambi lies in between. The entire countryside around Sparta is filled with olive and orange orchards from east to west and north to south. It is bordered by lengthy mountain ranges running north and south, one on each side. Quite beautiful.

Q: How does the Greece of today compare to your



Filmmaker Leonidas G. Demas, left, and son Chris are seen on the set of "A Spartan Dream." **ODYSSEY ENTERTAINMENT**

earlier trips?

A: Lord have mercy, I've been to Greece 15 times beginning in 1960 through last year. In 1960, there was no electricity in the countryside around Sparta. So we used oil lamps in the villages. No running water, so we went several times a day to the local well to bring buckets back home. No bathroom, just an outhouse. We could have been back in Byzantine times or even ancient Sparta and not known the difference. Back in 1960, the morals were very patriarchal and very strict. Still, the people enjoyed their simple lives immensely. But things quickly changed when electric lines stretched throughout the valley. All the conveniences sprung up. "A Spartan Dream" (set in 1987) was well past those days of candlelight.

Q: Where would you like to go that you have never been before?

A: Strangely enough, I would like to go to Xi'an, China, to see the Terracotta Army.

Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?

A: My first trip outside the continental U.S. was as a child of 10. We lived in Wheeling, West Virginia, and we were moving to Puerto Rico where my

father got a job as racing secretary at El Comandante Racetrack. I was thrilled and, in those days, there weren't many mainlanders there. Learned Spanish quickly and went to a local school for three years before going to a middle school run by the Methodist Church in Santurce.

Q: What was your best or worst vacation memory?

A: Probably when I was touring the Museo del Prado in Madrid. After about an hour of the guide showing us everything in the museum in great detail, I ran out of steam and began to faint. As I did, I ran toward a 15th-century settee along one of the walls. The guide yelled out that I was not to even touch that settee. I collapsed onto it and was lifted off by two attendants and was escorted to the closest bathroom, where they splashed my face. Then took me to the main entrance to wish me bon voyage.

Q: What was the most important thing you've learned from your travels?

A: I learned what every sane person learns. Underneath all the trappings, human beings are the same wherever you go.

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