

## Eulogy for George Bizos

Your Eminence Damaskinos, President Ramaphosa, other dignitaries, friends and relatives wherever you may be

I am Damon Bizos, George's middle son. On behalf of the Bizos family, I thank you for coming to celebrate his life. We are sad but heartened by the messages of condolence and obituaries from across the Globe.

*I have a message from my eldest brother Kimon, his wife Mary, and George's granddaughters Lucia, Sophia and Julia, who are in England and could not travel to be with us today.*

We are deeply sorry that it is not possible for us to be with you all today. Like many others, we are watching this from a screen far away.

First, we would like to send our thanks to those who took care of Papou when we could not be there: Damon and Alexi and their families, and Thoko, Grant, Susan and the medical and nursing staff. It was a comfort knowing he was surrounded by familiar and kind people.

George was our beloved dad, father-in-law and Papou, but his generous and courageous heart meant that we always shared him with a much wider community who claimed him as their own too, whether it was swimming in the sea in Greece, campaigning about the Parthenon sculptures at the British Museum in London, or sharing his memories at the Fort and Constitutional Court in Johannesburg. He was often baffled by the fuss and ceremony around him, but always made time for well-wishers.

On our last family visit to Johannesburg Papou took us to Yiayia Rita's grave, in Heroes' Acre, and, with a battered trowel and watering can, showed us how he wants us to tend the grave when he joins her there. We promise to do that, Papou, and always to nurture our precious memories of you and your great life's

work. We will remember the mischievous village boy who did not like wearing shoes and got into trouble with his mother after falling backwards when riding the horse and leading the donkey on a rein. We will try to remember and honour your small and big lessons: from noticing the curling leaves that means a plant needs to be watered, to finding the strength to stand up whenever we are faced with injustice. We will always remember your life with love and pride.

Papou often loved to recite this small part of the poem *Mythistorima*, by Seferis, to remind us all to keep striving, and hoping:

*A little farther*

*We will see the almond trees blossoming*

*The marble gleaming in the sun*

*The sea breaking into waves*

*A little farther*

*Let us rise a little higher.*

Thank you for everything. Rest in Peace. Ζωή σε μας.

My dad was born in humble circumstances and never lost his humility. At funerals, it is said you must not speak ill of the dead. My task is easy as his massive achievements were attained through hard work and scrupulous honesty. If he had a fault it was that he was too humble.

As young kids, despite an enormous workload, he ensured that he almost always came home for dinner and would not take calls during the meal (the calls were almost certainly Bugged). He often went out to work or SAHETI meetings thereafter. He made special time for us over the weekends. Family lunches with the Bizos, Roussos, Mentis and Panos families were expansive affairs as were the lunches at Yiayia Mary's house in Troyeville. During legal recess in December, we had memorable holidays in Plettenberg bay when it was still a fishing village. He only managed to get back to Greece in the 1970s. One must remember that the Nat government would not issue him a passport and he knew if he applied for a

Greek passport, he probably would be deported. He then ensured that the family ties in Greece were reconnected. Vasilitsi was his second Ithaca.

His early peasant life and forced migration left an indelible imprint on him and resulted in him detesting and fighting all forms of injustice especially when perpetrated by the powerful over the weak. Recent images of refugees in boats in the Mediterranean troubled him greatly, as did the poverty and inequality that he saw around him in South Africa.

He did things because it was the right thing to do. This was often the more difficult choice. He never expected anything in return. I knew that he was altruistic, but I never quite knew the extent of his benevolence and influence until I read the messages of condolence that often contained stories of how he had helped people and had touched their lives.

He was the epitome of a professional. When he took a case, nothing else mattered. His life and soul went into defending his client as if he, George, was on trial. His stamina, resilience and tenacity were legendary.

His three books cover a lot of his life's work. In no one to Blame? He chronicled his involvement in the inquests into the deaths of many detainees. With the referee against him, there were adverse findings. He nevertheless helped to expose the evilness of Apartheid security apparatus.

In Odyssey to Freedom, he describes his life and gives an account of the insidious implementation of the apartheid state. He also tells of how he met and fell in love with our late mother Arethe who died in 2017. His immense love for her over their 63-year marriage was exemplified when he ensured that she was cared for at home when a long and devastating illness befell her.

In 65 years of Friendship, he chronicles his friendship with Madiba. His Sunday morning chats with Madiba in Houghton gave him great pleasure. Graca Machel called them as a pair of lovebirds. He never disclosed what they talked about but I suspect George did most of the talking.

He spent almost 30 years as Senior Counsel in the litigation Unit of the LRC. In addition to winning numerous seminal cases, he mentored many young lawyers who became leaders in the profession. Many became judges. This too is one of his legacies.

George was devastated by the deaths of Arthur Chaskelson, Madiba, and my mother. Despite this, he continued working until he was 91 and resurrected the inquest into the Timol matter.

Others will speak of his great legal career and there is an online obituary that I recommend to you. He seemed to us to be involved in almost every major political case. Although he kept it very quiet at the time, his involvement in the initial stages of the negotiated settlement was immense.

He left legacies that need to be protected. When asked recently if he was disappointed in the state of the nation he said that things could have been done better but that there was no comparison with life under apartheid. He was certain that the Constitution will prevail. If we want to keep George's memory alive, we must all ensure that we protect and abide by the Constitution, a document which he helped to draft..

He was passionate about Hellenism and the lessons Hellenism has for modern day life, often quoting Ancient Greek playwrights and philosophers.

The fact that he led others in founding SAHETI School in 1974 at a time when he was very active in his legal career is testament to how hard he worked. His dream that his grandchildren would attend SAHETI was realised and the school has gone from strength to strength

He lived for his family, his work and Food. Judge Ivor Schwartzman related his recollections in a message he sent me yesterday. He remembered the times when as young lawyers they went to the gym, played poker and had lunches at the Riental restaurant. I replied that I was sure that more time was spent at Riental than at the gym.

He was not a material man. He lived his life according to his philosophy and principles, a lesson that might be learned by many a leader today.

One Saturday afternoon about 5 years ago, I went past the house in which he lived for 61 years. The house seldom saw a lick of paint although the vegetable garden was well tended. I asked him how he was. He said he had had a terrible day. I enquired why. He said he had decided to see how it would feel to be retired so he had done nothing all day

We were fortunate to have him for so long. He required numerous hospitalizations over the last few years and I thank the doctors and staff at the WDGMC and Milpark for caring for him. He once needed an operation to restore blood flow to one of his legs. He made a deal with the surgeon that he may proceed with the operation providing he could get back to the Marikana Commission 3 days later to continue cross-examination. This duly happened.

He came from an era when legal giants made a difference. To achieve what he did he needed the help of others. He led by example. He always talked about what "we" have done as opposed to what "I" have done. I thank all his family, carers and colleagues who helped him achieve what he did- he did not walk alone.

He led a courageous and exemplary life. May his legacies endure. We will all miss him dearly