



PHOTO: ARCHIVE VISUAL STORYTELLERS

# GUARDIAN ANGEL OF THE HEART

*An admirable charitable project is bringing back the smile on the face of thousands of needy children all over the world.* BY KATERINA FRENTZOU

Every child with heart disease, is a life project for him, whether it's in Greece, Mozambique, Libya, Georgia or Ecuador. The world-renowned Greek pediatric cardiac surgeon Afksendiyos Kalangos, has dedicated himself to his charitable work with incredible will and perseverance. His humanitarian work is international. Founder of his charitable organisation "Coeurs pour tous" (Hearts for all) and the Kalangos Foundation, Dr. Afksendiyos Kalangos is an ecumenical doctor. A contemporary missionary of Medicine, who offers his services to the "forgotten" of the world, having operated gratis with his medical team on over 15,000 destitute children, all over the planet. He often describes in his interviews the moment that he made the momentous decision to follow Medicine. "When I was young, my father, a pathologist in Istanbul, would send me to get the newspaper. One day in 1967 I saw a significant front page story: the first heart transplant performed by Barnard in South Africa. I ran to my father and told him with conviction, 'when I grow up, I'll become a surgeon like him.' Of course, this was a childhood dream, but growing up, I never gave it up..."

Philanthropy is a family tradition. He remembers that the courtyard of their house in Istanbul was filled every day with people waiting patiently to be examined by his father, the doctor. "Many of these people, had no money to pay for the visit or medicines and my father, after examining them gratis, would give them his own money. He would always tell me: 'Your goal shouldn't be the money but the task and you shouldn't turn away from those in need.'" Apart from his father, his great teacher, he had the good fortune to work next to leading teachers of Medicine, sir Magdi Yacoub and Alain Carpentier (father of the first artificial heart valve). "They both gave me a 'transfusion' of altruism and strength that a surgeon must possess", he notes.

A professor at the University Hospital of Geneva and the University of Istanbul, the "poor children's doctor" as he is called, graduated in 1984, at the age of 23, from the American Medical School of Istanbul, specialised in surgery in London and subsequently dedicated himself to heart surgery for children and newborns in Paris and the USA. As the owner of the "Kalangos Ring" patent - an innovative "ring" which is placed on the child's heart to repair the mitral valve, he grants the rights to his charitable

foundation, to do supplemental training for doctors and nurses in the Third World. He teaches his students that knowledge is gained and advancement in the field of science requires seriousness and discipline. "In surgery, the surgeon must have absolute control and know the facts thoroughly", he notes. "His responsibility is huge and is primarily spiritual, as it pertains to the life of another person. He must feel obliged to save his patient."

With many awards and distinctions, the "guardian angel" of poor sick children, was honoured by the Greek Red Cross with the Gold Cross of Highest Distinction, with Golden Laurel Wreath, for his significant philanthropic work, by the President of the Greek Red Cross, Dr. Antonios Avgerinos, on the occasion of the celebration of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, on Sunday, May 8 2016. But for him, the greatest reward is that he sees a smile returning to a small child's face. "There's no greater gift, than seeing the children you've operated on in good condition. This is for me the greatest happiness that a surgeon can experience!"

Flying 300,000 miles every year in Europe and developing countries and with approximately 600 open heart operations, thousands of indigent children are living normal lives again, thanks to his magic hands and big heart. Of course, his relationship with his young patients is bidirectional: he gives them the possibility of a normal life and the children imbue his life with a deeper meaning.

## **THE "COEURS POUR TOUS" FOUNDATION IN GREECE**

The international foundation "Coeurs pour tous" is expanding its humanitarian activities to our country too. As a subsidiary to the international foundation that professor Afksendiyos Kalangos created in Geneva in 1998, "Coeurs pour tous Hellas" (CpTH), was founded as a concrete commitment to contribute to Greek society and the young patients of families of limited means. In Greece, 800 to 1,000 infants are born every year with heart disease, of which a third, mainly newborns, need immediate surgery. The heart surgeon Afksendiyos Kalangos has operated gratis for the past year on poor and uninsured children in Greece with congenital heart disease at MITERA hospital and "Coeurs pour tous Hellas" provides financial support to their families, giving them a chance at a normal life.

*7.000.000 children in the world need open heart surgery - 7.000.000 really serious reasons that led the professor and surgeon Afksendiyos Kalangos to create in 1998, the international foundation "Coeurs pour tous", aiming to provide medical and financial support for indigenous children with heart disease.*

Bill & Co Hotels Mykonos are proud sponsors of the "Coeurs pour tous" foundation. You may find more information at the reception desks.