

My mother has always been a person who likes and gets excited about trying something new and different. When she first introduced olive oil to us at our dining table, I must have been about ten years old (which means around 1990 in Japan). She explained that olive oil is expensive and only a small amount should be used for stir fries and salads. I remember the strange smell and the bitterness of the oil and not liking it at all. Nonetheless, I got used to the flavor as time went by, and after I moved to the states I was accustomed to use it daily. In the recent years since I have shifted my life to Europe, I often times only have olive oil in the kitchen and end up cooking Asian stir fries with it. There are so many kinds and grades of olive oils, and I acquired to enjoy the rich, flavorful olive oils as themselves.

My not-too-distant yet not-too-close relationship with olives mainly as a food was changed by a friend of mine and the event that had happened to him in the last summer (2008). At first the impact was very minute and later became significant with the amplified magnitudes. On that day, my artist friend, Alex, who is a Greek decent German, started telling me about a mountain fire occurring in Greece, which was not yet calmed down. Mountain fire is surely a serious danger in the dry climate of Greece, however, as it seemed that Alex's biggest anger and sorrow were pointed at the fact that the fire was burning down lots of olive trees on the land. The fire apparently also burnt 'the most important, symbolic olive tree in Greece'. He expressed that he has been feeling as if his country diminished, his pride was destroyed, and he felt too humiliated and sad to go outside for a few weeks. I thought him as such a drama queen in my mind and tried cheering him up with weightless words.

However, as time passed by I started pondering about this story, thinking it is so crazy yet impressive as how a tree can sum up the country's pride and nationality. My thought wondered to the olive tree I have never seen, nor possibly will never see if it is indeed burnt down by the fire. What is olives to Greek people? They might take a part in the people's life as a food or an ingredient of soap. They might surround the people as a landscape from the train windows or as a plant in the garden. They, to be precise this one olive tree, might exist in the people's minds as nearly a protecting god of the county. Perhaps affected by a bit of craze but also something pure in the story, I came to long for some connection to the olive tree as well.

The connection might mean seeing the tree personally, or creating some record of it. It might also be brought indirectly by searching the images of the tree in people's memories and emotions. Without a clear ending or goal, I am now going to start my attempt of having some connect to the tree. (May 10, 2009)