



TO BE AUSTRALIAN

The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis - 5 May 2014

As a young man I was often asked what is an Australian like and what does it feel to be an Australian. When faced with such a question, I am reminded of a time when I was a young soldier passing through a country town in Far North Queensland. I had stopped overnight at a local pub in order to rest and move on the next day. I registered at the front and went to my room to drop my personal belongings before going to the bar to quench my thirst.

I ordered a beer and drank it slowly surveying my environment and the various paintings and pictures on the wall. Some were of local identities, race horses, scenes of a bygone era such as drovers, steam trains, grazing cattle and the odd photo of a Prime Minister of old. Whatever the case may have been it added to the atmosphere of the country pub.

As I looked around, I noticed a couple of old blokes eying me off, probably wondering where I had come from and where I was heading. They were sitting at the round tables playing cards and whispering amongst themselves as if no one else was in the room. To me they appeared as if they were in a world of their own. At the other end of the bar there were two non locals, alien to the local landscape and to Australia. This was evident from their manner of speech and their body language. It was obvious to me that they were 'Pommies' who were on a tour of Australia.

These two blokes were talking with a couple of local lads, advising them how in their country everything was better, from the service, beer, women, hotels, country, their laws and their attitude to life. The two local blokes listened passively for at least a couple of hours making small headway and pointing out the positive aspects of Australia, like its beaches and shorelines, the mountains and its people, the clean water and air Australia had to offer and the carefree outlook on life in general.

This however had no effect on these two 'Pommies' as they continued with their tirade and kept up with their bragging of how great their country was. At one stage I the so called one way discussion one of the Aussies asked the question, 'if their country was so great, why did they bother coming to Australia'. The 'Pommie' in this case looked at the Aussie and said that 'we have come here to educate you in the fine arts of living'.

Well you could hear a pin drop on the wooden floor, a floor that was in dire need of a bit of water and a polish to bring out the shine from beneath the dirt and grime. 'Whack', 'whack' and it was all over. One of the 'Pommies' was on the ground holding his jaw while the other knelt to help to his feet. When the 'Pommy' was on his feet, the local Aussie said to him:

'Cobber', we have stood here for two hours while you rubbished this country and yet we said nothing against you or your origins. 'The reason you got a smack in the mouth is because of your ignorance and your lack of appreciation for what Australia is all about. Mate, we don't care where you come from, what skin colour you have nor of the origins of your culture. What we care about is that you when you come to this country and make Australia home you respect our environment and those that live here.

I had finished sipping my beer whilst observing the whole episode unravel before my very eyes and only at the end it, did it strike me that here in a pub stuck way out in the outback, I had found the essence of what an Aussie was all about. It embodied everything that I had learned while serving the Australian Defence Force. Mateship, being there for your mates, doing it tough and not complaining, giving it your best shot no matter what challenges you are faced with in life, never giving up in the face of adversity and at the same time being compassionate about those close to you.

It brought home to me, what makes us Aussies stand out from all other countries and what is our secret in our tolerance of others. It was not just our 'fair go' attitude, 'fair crack of the whip', 'never kick a bloke when he is down', 'standing up for the battler' or all of them combined. It was a feeling of belonging and being part of the Australian landscape, no matter where we came from, what our origins, culture was as long as we made Australia our home. What makes the average bloke tick is what has eluded many visitors to this country and I am often asked to describe the average Aussie.

As the years went by and wisdom finally decided to rest her weary soul onto mine, I began to understand that beneath that tough Aussie exterior beat a heart of gold. I applied these early lessons well when faced with my own demons in life and there were many I can tell you. It helped to understand why the word multiculturalism, what it stood for but also that it was not universally accepted by all Australians. This was despite all the good work and planning that went into the policies, the word in itself was far too divisive to be palatable to an Australian society.

Today, my mind always goes back to that little outback pub where I understood the essence of being an Aussie. Today, multiculturalism to me is but a vehicle to becoming a good Australian citizen, nothing more and nothing less. It's time now for Australians no matter where their origins, what their skin colour and/or culture to embrace Australia for what it is and call it home.

Being born in Greece and coming to Australia in 1954 with my parents, father Vasili, mother Kaliopi and little brother Phillip, Australia has always been home. In fact I have always found that my heritage has stood me in good stead amongst my peers and colleagues no matter where I was at the time. Australia is now no longer a multicultural society but one race. Whether you have taken out citizenship or not is not the issue.

What is expected of you is that if you are to live and work in this country, you should be contributing to its economic prosperity, to its well being, defence and security as well as abiding by its laws. Only then you have the right to be called an Australian. If you fall outside those parameters it must mean that you have just arrived in Australia and you must be a New Australian.



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