

AUSTRALIA DAY 26 JANUARY 2013



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I attended Australia day commemoration at my local RSL today. The RSL being located across the road, a mere 75 paces was not a far walk. I opened the green gate leading out to the street and with the Australian flag flying proudly in the background located in my back yard; I walked the few yards across the vehicle car park to the ceremony. On arrival I was immediately struck by the poor turn of people in attendance and wondered why was it that so few had come out to acknowledge Australia Day.

I began to make excuses to myself and for those absent on the grounds that the weather was overcast, that it was not promoted effectively by the local RSL or that it was too far to go and possibly people were still out shopping being a Saturday. Worse still did people really think that Australia was on the coming Monday because it was public holiday. Those that had braved the windy and overcast weather were a mainly staff, local residents and the elderly, with few of the younger generation. Nevertheless it was disappointing outlook.

I listened to the guest speaker John Cullen, OAM, the Victorian State Honorary Treasurer speak about Australia and its cultural diversity, of the Victorian Cross winners in the suburb of Macleod and a brief description on how there had earned they medal of courage under fire. It was an eloquent speech full of patriotism and one that would make you feel proud of being an Australian. Even though John may have forgotten my face in the myriad of people he meets every day, it was good to see him again. Both of us were infantrymen and had served with the Royal Australian Regiment in bygone years.

John had progressed throughout the years within the RSL hierarchy to the role that he held today. We spoke briefly like to old soldiers about what was and what was not about life and health in general. I also enquired whether my old mate David Leuin was still on the board and enquired about the health of that grand old man Keith Rossi. Not much, just a brief chat like old soldiers does.

Due to slight hitch with the music, we manage to sing the last few bars of the Australian National Anthem, (a legacy of Peter Dodds McCormick, a Scottish born composer) and with that the ceremony was concluded. In the true Australian spirit, attendees were cordially invited to enter the premises for light refreshments and drinks to further celebrate Australia. Unfortunately I declined on the grounds that my wife and I were to visit a long time school chum to celebrate Australia Day.



On the short walk back home I reflected on the commemoration and hoped that the poor gathering of today's Australia Day did not create a precedence for future gatherings or that the struggles faced by past Australians become a mere memory and just another holiday. I did not want that to occur nor did I want it to be thrust into the cornerstones of history so to speak. I also wondered whether on this day other RSLs' and/or like minded communities and institutions had suffered the same poor turnout and whether the local councils with their huge budgets had bothered to celebrate Australia day.

I wondered further whether the governments of the day at the State and Federal level had the foresight to push the "barrow" of the Australian people and not peddle their own political agendas on Australia day. Would these self serving governments take the time to implement policies that went to the heart of the matter of what Australia day met and how to embed that "Australianism" into the fabric of Australian society. Were parents encouraging their children to be proud of being in this country and that despite their own cultural differences accepted Australian values and their customs on an equal basis.

Were the educational institutions supporting the Australian culture and encouraging their students to take an active e interests in the well being of Australia and its people. All of this was possible if only governments and institutions gave the right encouragement in the right quarters and to the right people population that being an Australian was ok and that it would not clash with their original cultural or religious beliefs.

Being an Australian in this day and age meant that you are not questioned on your cultural or religious beliefs as long as those beliefs contributed to the well being of its people and the nation as a whole. After all giving a bloke a fair go is part of the Australian character. However I found that I was being bombarded with far too many questions that were beyond my comprehension and thinking of them all at once made my mind reel at trying to find a solution.

As I reached to open the green gate with its signs of "Beware of dogs" and "Water tank on the premises" and the top of the gate overwhelmed by the sweet smell of the jasmine bush, I reflected on what Australia was all about and what it meant to me over the years. I knew in my own heart of hearts that it had nothing to do with the military exploits of its people (although it is an integral part of its makeup), nor was it only about the indigenous people, the original owners of this land who for many viewed Australia day as a day of invasion by the Europeans until thee was time of reconciliation and Australia became established and acknowledged that it was for all Australians.

Further than that it was not about the so called American concept of the "Melting pot" of the worlds people because that was a fallacy, nor about multiculturalism which for many is a negative concept, except for people like myself that viewed multiculturalism as a vehicle upon which was a means of integrating into Australian society and becoming its citizen. No, Australia day means something a lot more than the above.

Australia Day is about belonging, one people no matter their origins, culture religion, backgrounds but being one nation that is free to chose its own destiny, free from aggression and freedom to express one's self without the fear of retribution and the freedom to enjoy the resources and the environment that like no other place on earth. Australia Day was also a time when one could take time out and reflect on the past, make plans for the future and live for the day in relative peaceful and comfortable surroundings.

Unlike ANZAC Day where we remembered the fallen, Australia Day was for all Australians no matter where they came from, whether it was from the highlands of Scotland, Europe to the mountain ridges of Nepal in Asia. A day when one could fly the flag proudly on your vehicle fluttering in the wind as you sped by or like me in my back yard flying in the breeze. The Australian flag whether you agreed with its design was immaterial, it was still an Australian flag and we as Australians have every right to feel proud for it is our own.

Having the above thoughts in my mind, I reflected on who had contributed to this great land of ours. It all began with the indigenous population, the original owners of this land, the people who we call the aboriginal people, a nation of tribes living in their own eco spheres with their own laws, cultures and myths to sustain them and eking out a living according to their needs. Some would say it was only natural that others would eventually come to see that Australia was a land of plenty and that its resources were sufficient to include other peoples arriving to share in the wealth of the nation and to contribute to its long term well being.

On the other hand some would say that Australia was invaded and took over the land from its original owners by force and thus pushing an ancient people back into history and almost extinction. Whatever the case may be, whether there has been sufficient reconciliation and amends been made to the original owners over land and/or the "stolen generation" is a matter of conjecture and only history can become the judge of that. These nation of tribes have much to teach their cousins now sharing this land and together the future will become even brighter as Australians more aware of their past and of the history of the original owners, the first people.

The Europeans of Anglo Saxon background with their rich history of Angles, Jutes, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, Gaelic, English, British and certainly Frankish (Norman) cultures laid the foundations upon a virgin soil so to speak and prepared future generations to carve out a path that would lead to security, prosperity and a freedom not known elsewhere. These early pioneers struggled in alien environment, clearing the bush and hinterland to make a living and build institutions that would stand the test of time.

Coming to the defence of freedom whenever they were called and fighting the good fight. These second generation Australians after the original owners created a legend in their own time and left this earth leaving behind a legacy of mateship, doing the right thing, don't let your cobber down, fierce in battle, sticking up for the underdog, tolerant of other cultures and never kicking a bloke when he is down. These and many other legacies are still being followed this day.

They would be followed by the Chinese who in many ways contributed to the welfare of the nation during the gold rush days and the years that followed the gold boom. Despite the unwarranted fear of the so called "yellow peril" and whether it was on the gold fields, or in the market gardens or during the World wars, the Chinese presence was a contributing factor in the well being of Australia. Today, that fear of the yell peril has been replaced with a tolerance that would surprise those living in the Victorian era.

The Afghans and Turkish people that were brought out to Australia to operate the camel drives that carried precious water and supplies to those living in the outback. The Japanese with their contribution to the war effort on the side of the Allies in WW1 and their contribution to the pearling industry in West Australia are not to be forgotten despite their belligerent and errant ways during WW2. The Torres Strait islanders who have become an integral part of Australia and who have traditionally supported the nation in time of war.

The blond blue eyed Dutch, Germans, the dark haired and olive skinned Greeks and Italians along with their eastern Europeans (Baltic countries, Latvia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Finland, Russia etc) cousins that came to the gold fields, mining towns, wine, fishing, agricultural, Hydro electric dams, and contributing to Australia's Defence Force (even though during WW1 and WW2 the parents of German and Italian background would be incarcerated in internment camps while their sons went off to war in Defence of Australia). These as well as the relative new comers, the Vietnamese people that came after the Vietnam war was over have all contributed in one form or another to this land we call Australia.

There are many other cultures and people that have contributed in one form or another, whether on a small scale or not are immaterial. Whether they are of Lebanese, Iraqi, East Timorese, Somalians, South Africans, Malaysians, Burmese, Sri Lankans, Indians and/or our Kiwi cousins, they are part of this country

we call Australia. I am convinced that there are many nations and cultures which I have not included, not on purpose, but rather as a result of my own ignorance for not having the knowledge to know what other peoples have arrived in Australia the past 25 years.

No matter where Australians came from, the policies that are in place today are designed to integrate the new arrivals in Australia and thus strengthen the fabric that binds us. A nation that is one people with the same set of desires, aspirations, ambitions, dreams and the resources to amalgamate the best of what they can offer as individuals, citizens, captains of industry and/or law makers rather than a fragmentation of conglomerate tribal nations.

It has now been some 58 years that I have been living in Australia and during that time I would like to think that I and my family have integrated well and have contributed to the well being and longevity of Australia and its people. It would be nice to think that throughout those years, it was all a dream run; but that would be far too simplistic and optimistic to say the least. Each challenge was met with the knowledge and resources on hand and moved on with the hope that the next day was to be a better one.

Living in Australia has certainly provided my immediate family and that of the extended one, opportunities that would have not been available back in the old country had we remained in location back in the 1950s'. Needless to say, one can truly say that Australia as a nation is on the verge or about to enter an era of greatness. An era that is yet to unfold and like a flower in bloom, awoken from its blanket of a small nation to take on the responsibilities and it's shared of the of the world's problems. I as an Australian of Hellenic heritage look forward to a positive if not interesting future. May we look back on today in twenty year's time and say to ourselves, Australia this was your time.



These were the thoughts that went through my mind as I closed the green gate behind me and made my way up the steps to the front door and thanking my dear parents for having the courage and the tenacity to make the journey to a country that lay on the other side of the world, to a country we now call home. Australia. **Peter Adamis**