

# AUSTRALIA DAY

*A FAIR DINKUM MILLENIUM DAY FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS OF GREEK ORIGINS*



Everyone has a point of view as to how they see Australia day in the new millennium. It is certainly a far cry from the generations of Australians of a bygone era. That bygone era being post WW2 and the arrival of millions of migrants escaping the horrors of WW2. This article skims only the surface and does not accurately reflect all of the feelings of what Australia day may mean to those of the past and certainly not the views of the younger generation of Australians of Hellenic heritage. Rather it's more of a reflection of just how far the migrants of this great nation have matured and contributed to it.

As young immigrants in the 50's and 60's we who were of Hellenic stock did not understand exactly what Australia Day meant, nor its true meaning as it is known today. All that we knew was that Australia day was a special Day for the Anglo Saxons (or the "Anglezi" as we called Australians) and that the "Anglezi" stood to attention and saluted the flag. The word "Anglezi" symbolised all those of Anglo Saxon background. The "Anglezi" were not seen as Australians for we felt that the only true Australians' were the Aborigines that were living in Australia long before the white man came. This, migrants knew from their schooling back in Greece.

In the 50s and 60's, while at school, we as youngsters, with the Australian flag flying high on the school mast we would start the day by standing to attention; neatly in our rows outside in the school yard in front of the headmaster with the school band playing, sang "Long the Queen, Long may she reign over us" etc. The anthem to the Queen had emotional strains attached to it and it gave one a sense of belonging to something greater than our own. It was a nice and easy song to remember and one wonders why in 1984 it was changed to Advance Australia Fair which many of us found it difficult to remember all the words.

At Greek school which was mainly at the local church. St Constantine's and Helen in Praharan (the original collapsed in the authors day), we would proudly sing the Greek National anthem with pride and with emotion. I guess because we were young, impressionable and not being any wiser, did not understand the Australian national Anthem as well as the Greek. After all, education and culture began at home. As youngsters, we were in a bind. At school If you did not conform or try and learn the national anthem, there was always corporal punishment in the form of the leather strap and you would be looked upon as an outcast; while at Greek school or at home, if we did not learn the Greek alphabet

and memorize the Greek anthem, we would also receive a hiding. No matter which way you looked at it, we could not win either way. Talk about a "Spartan" upbringing?

On reflection it was no surprise that cultural conflict would emerge its ugly head and divide families. This cultural divide began to grow within us causing cultural and family disharmony at home with the children who were learning English and in many cases interpreting for their parents. The parents as role models felt inadequate and ill at ease to see the changes occurring on a daily within their families. Their fears on today's standard would be seen as cultural baggage, a heavy and fearful baggage borne out of the atrocities witnessed during WW2 and passed onto their children. Therefore Australia Day in the home of most Greek homes was replaced by chores, reading and writing Greek, learning the cultural aspects of the Greek language and religion. Those whose parents who were more enlightened would allow their children to partake in Australian day activities conducted by the local council or school and thus exposing their children to the Australian way of life early, without the fear of losing their Greek identity.

The meaning of Australia and what it meant to Australians of Hellenic origins took on a new meaning in the 70's. A fresh wave of thinking was coming to the fore, a wave of wanting to be part of Australia, wanting to be an Australian and to enjoy all the trapping of what it meant to be an Australian was washing over the Australians of Greek heritage. Free education, removal of barriers, job equality, cultural integration as against assimilation, immigrant acceptance by the wider Australian community, intermarriages and a host of many other changes that opened all doors to the new generations of migrants whose parents had arrived in the 50's and 60's. This change was almost immediate and with the doors all being opened, the Greek migrants began to spread throughout the various suburbs of the major cities of Australia. Mind you, a nucleus always remained in one form or another within the major cities that one could rightly call the Greek area.

Yes they wanted to be Australians and yes they wanted to feel Greek at the same time. Some embraced the Australia way of life completely immersing themselves in all things Australian and forgetting their Hellenic heritage, but the majority had the wisdom and foresight to value both culture without one dominating the other. Australia day had come to mean a whole new meaning to Australians of Greek heritage. No longer feeling inadequate or second class citizens, for at long last they truly felt part of the fabrics of Australian society. From that decade onwards, Australia Day was celebrated by Australians of all cultures without the fear of being looked upon as a leper or an outcast. The Australian Greeks sympathized with their aboriginal brethren who saw Australia Day as a day of invasion hoped that some form of reconciliation would take place as they considered them the original Australians and not the Anglo Saxons who had invaded the country.

As the years went by, so did the remaining barriers and cultural differences. It became chic to be considered an ethnic to some, while to others they felt it was too divisive. For many in Australian society, you were looked upon as an Australian by birth, Australian by citizenship, an Australian of long term residence or you retained your identity with the old country and did not integrate. The latter however were few in numbers and it was more of not having the

capacity or the knowledge to integrate without losing the cultural heritage rather than embracing the Australian culture. Australia day however by this time had reached its peak and became the established holiday celebrated by all Australians no matter their origins or heritage. A day where all Australians could stand up and be counted as one people, one nation, under one flag, without fear or favour.

The 80's also brought many changes, like the changes in the Australian Anthem, reconciliation, Allegiance to Australia and not the Queen of Great Britain. Those in the Australian Defence had to be discharge on one day under the old allegiance (to the Queen) and reenlist in the Australian Defence Force the next day with our allegiance to Australia. A mere formality some may say, but looking back to those days of confusion, the author remembers the odd one or two who took advantage of this administrative ambiguity and either resigned or were discharged for not reenlisting under the new conditions. It was a most confusing time for many of us who were serving the nation in one capacity or another. These changes of course had no bearing on Australia day other than learning how to remember the new national anthem, Advance Australia Fair.

From the author's point of view, he found it rather odd that the national anthem was being changed at a time when we still retained the union jack on our flag. It was even more peculiar find that the new national anthem was created by Peter Dodds McCormick, a Scottish born composer and it was felt that the original owners of the land were not being acknowledged. Many of those with the larrikin spirit and sense of false sense of bravado (including the author) wanted to sing Waltzing Matildas instead as we felt that it symbolised the Australian character, was emotional and it had ties to the Australian landscape. Despite submissions and objections from various communities, it was not to be and Advance Australia Fair became the official anthem sung on Australia Day at all official functions and events. With the flags of both nations flying proudly in the gentle breeze, Advance Australia Fair is now played at every major event that is hosted or held by Australians of Greek origins.

In essence Australia Day in the new millennium means many things to many people. Australians of Hellenic origins and are now to be found in every sphere of Australian society, whether it's in the industrial and construction sectors, public service, professional spheres, academic world, political, defence or in the agricultural and farming areas, they and their families are contributing to the strength of the Australian nation. It is the authors belief that it is a time to reflect and remember those who have gone before us, the original owners of this land, its beauty and its landscape, to feel free, secure, to raise families, to enjoy life and to thank our lucky stars that we live in a land where being an Australian means to belong to one nation no matter where our origins may lie.

Further to the above, we as Australians have come a very long way and as a nation, we are on the verge of greatness. Alongside that greatness will also come the emotional and maturity awareness, that we are truly are a unique people borne, (*no longer tied to the mother country wherever that may be*) out of a struggle to survive in an alien environment tamed by generations of migrants that has created an Australia Day for all. **Peter Adamis**