



# MICHAEL LIDIS

Peter Adamis 1 February 2017

This article is dedicated to Michael Lidis as one of many Greeks who contributed greatly to the welfare of his fellow Greeks but like many whose contributions have not been acknowledged. This small article goes towards rectifying this anomaly. Michael Lidis was born in Cairo Egypt to Greek parents in December 1922. His grandfather's name was surname Anapostolagas. Many of the Greeks had settled in Egypt after the forced expulsion of the Greeks from Asia Minor immediately after World War 1. Michael's grandfather on the other hand had left many years before the expulsion of Greeks from Turkey and therefore was able to take advantage of the many opportunities that were available to Greeks and other nationalities at that time.

When the new wave of Greeks arrived after being expelled from Asia Minor, the Anapostolagas (Lidis) family prospered even further as a result. The family along with other Greeks living in Cairo at that time provided the new influx of refugees with the support and assistance to resettle in Egypt. He had a successful business as (patasias) boiling and breaking down the fats from animals carcasses' for human consumption. It must have been very successful to have been able to provide a university education for his son to become a civil engineer. Michael Lidis father worked on some of the major buildings in Cairo and he had changed his surname to Apostolidis. His father worked hard and provided a comfortable if not above average lifestyle for his family.

It is now a well known fact that those Greeks who had resettled in Egypt rather than Greece prospered far greater than their compatriots that resettled on the Greek mainland. The Greeks of Egypt were better educated, including the women, more freedom and a higher standard of living than those Greeks in Greece. This became even more apparent after World War 2 when the Nasser the then President of Egypt expelled the Greeks from Egypt forcing them to seek new homes elsewhere throughout the world. Nasser felt that the Greeks had become a millstone and a burden on the Egyptians and were concerned that the Greeks were in control of the economy. The Greeks of Egypt migrated to other parts of the world in their thousands and many of them coming to Australia.

Michael Lidis upbringing in Cairo prior to WW2 enabled him to have a good grasp of the world around him and to give him the skills and knowledge that would propel him to be involved in helping his fellow Greeks later on in life. His parents instilled him the Greek culture along with their values, ethics and morals to help him throughout life's journey. Although he completed his High school education, further studies were cut short by World War 2. At the age of 18, Michael enlisted into the British Commonwealth forces along with thousands of other Greeks that were living in Egypt at that time. He was an infantryman with many others of Greek heritage serving under British High command and as a result of this, was able to be counted as having served with his Majesty's forces and subsequently Commonwealth Forces. Michael saw active service in the numerous hotspots of Egypt and other theatres of war. He remained under British command for four years until he was demobilized at the cessation of World War 2.

On the cessation of hostilities, Michael met and married Melpomenni (Melpo or Mel) in Cairo. They had two children, Nick and Chris whilst living in Egypt. The family was happy in Egypt at that time, but it became apparent to many of the Greeks including Michael and Melpo that as a result of the Suez crisis, the situation in Egypt was becoming unhealthy for the Greek population. Therefore as a result of further discussion, Michael came to Australia in 1955 by himself to find work, accommodation and prepare for to bring his family over to join him as soon as he was settled.

When he arrived at Port Philip docks, the person who had assisted in bringing him over was nowhere to be seen and Michael was stranded at the docks. Michael however was a very resourceful and enterprising young man who was not fazed by this setback so easily. He took a taxi to the Egyptian Greek association in the city where he knew he would get support. On arrival he spoke to the Association members and advised them of his plight. They took him in and gave him accommodation until he was able to find accommodation for himself.

It was sooner rather than later that Michael was able to land himself a job with the glass factory located in Spotswood in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The job was hard, dirty, conditions appalling and there was no occupational health and safety regulations in those days. You went to work gave it your best and then went home exhausted. This went on day after day until he was able to save sufficient fund to bring his family over from Egypt. When the rest of the family arrived, Michael continued in his job at the glass factory to the dismay of his wife Melpo. She was concerned about his health and the effect it was having on the family by coming home exhausted from the factory.

One day, Michael came home all burnt from an accident that had occurred at the glass factory. This time Melpo was determined that enough was enough and put her foot down. She advised her husband Michael that he would have to find alternative work that did not create so much stress and put him at so much risk. She was confident that her husband with his good education and upbringing would have no problem in finding another job more suitable. After all, he was a very resourceful, energetic and highly motivated for someone who had not been in Australia for very long.

It is of interest to note that the Egyptian Greeks who settled in Australia had not lost their sense of Hellenism, and it was obvious to many other Greeks that the those arriving from Egypt were not only better educated, but were also multi linguistic enabling them to be given jobs as foreman, supervisors, managerial positions as against their Greek compatriots who had normally been drawn from the poorer parts of Greece and had no education or linguistic skills. Michael was of those Greeks.

He soon found a job with the Ford motor company and was employed as a supervisor overseeing many other workers from many different nationalities. His linguistic skills enabled him to advocate on behalf of many other Greeks and others who had a poor command of the English language. In fact there are many who owe much to their well being as a result of the support and assistance provided by Michael Lidis during those difficult days of integration into the Australian culture and way of life. Michael being the man he was, restive and a creative person wanted to achieve much more than just helping others to develop further their lifestyle and way in life. Michael was to move with his family to Chadstone and he found a job with Repco, remaining for quite some time. He was happy in this role as it helped him and Melpo raise their family in a quiet neighbourhood and enable him to pursue other interests at the same time.

During their time in Chadstone, Michael became involved in assisting many of the Greeks in the Dandenong and Doveton areas. He would often be seen helping Greeks get to church, assist in arranging couples to meet, get them married, assist them with their christening arrangements, conduct and coordinate events and provide administrative support long before the new generation was able to take over in their roles as teachers, doctors, lawyers and social workers. Until the next generation took over, the bulk of the social support structure fell upon people like Michael Lidis and others like him. Michael also became heavily involved with the local Soccer club in the Dandenong and Doveton areas. In fact one could say that had it not been for Michael's determination, drive and tenacity, the soccer club would not have survived without his support and patronage.

During all this time in working, assisting others, raising the family and creating the local soccer club, Michael was also very active in setting up the Greek RSL that catered for all of the Greeks that had served in The Australian and Commonwealth Military Forces. One could say that without Michael's commitment, passion and motivation, the Hellenic RSL would not have been able to survive and be what it is today. Michael along with many others held together the Hellenic RSL and thus was able to attract over 400 full time paid up members throughout his presidency and support which spanned over a twenty five year period. During that time he participated, coordinated and oversaw the Hellenic RSL and guided it through the difficult years.

In the late 1990, Michael was recommended for the Order of Australia along with another member of the Hellenic RSL, but was passed over on that occasion for the award. There were other efforts to award him the OAM but unfortunately life events overtook him and the years took their toll on Michael's health. Although he remained an active member of the Hellenic RSL, he was unable to put in the time and effort that he was able to do as in the past. As a result of this inactivity, Michael's health deteriorated to the point that he was unable to be kept at home and looked after by Melpo. Michael was visited a number of times by his friends from the Hellenic RSL, but the visits were few and far between.

After the first few visits it was apparent that Michael was not able to maintain his concentration and focus on the day to day matters of life. Sadly Michael died in 2004 at the age of 82 years. He is survived by his wife Melpo, children Nick and Chris and their families. Melpo now lives alone and is visited by her husband's good friend of many years Kon Dimou and his wife and also by her two sons when they are in Melbourne. Both sons live interstate as a result of their current employment. Melpo is strong, hale and hearty and in good spirits as at the time of writing this article in November 2008.

Melpo has since passed away and although I am not sure of the date, I have been advised by my parents that the Lidis home was sold some time during 2016. I don't know the current status of the family and relatives, but I do wish them all the best and not to underestimate all the good work of Michael Lidis and his lovely wife Melpo. It is these type of stories that must be written in order that others in the future can look back and realise just how life was for their parents and grandparents.



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