

ANTONI (ANTHONY) PETSIS

The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis



Antoni (Anthony) Petsis Antoni Petsis was born on the 3 September 1961 in a small village called Tsaritsani at the foothills of Mount Olympus. The village is situated close to the main regional town of Larisa in Greece.

It is a picturesque village where those living in the cities would love to return and see their remaining days out in peace and relative solitude.

The mountains in the background would veer up high with the sun rising in morning mist and setting down amidst the animals and fowl that were part of the village rural setting. Water was and still is plentiful to irrigate the plantation and fields that produced the food for the families residing in the village. The village like many others of its kind was agrarian producing village where the people grew their own food, from the planting of vegetables, animal livestock.



Tsaritsani at the foothills of Mount Olympus. Any additional grain, vegetable or animal produce was sold in the markets of the regional towns to supplement their incomes.

Antoni's parents Sotiri and Eftihia had lived and survived the horrors of the second World war and the Greek civil war and knew that ignorance, fear and lack of an education was an evil that could not be tolerated in the new world after the wars.

Sotiri and Eftihia were blessed with five children of whom Antoni was the youngest. Antoni parents worked hard to bring up their children. Despite the war interrupting their life they did however learn the lessons of life that for families to survive, sacrifices would have to be made in order that the family unit survived any calamity.

They were also were also aware that for their family to have a quality of life, further sacrifices would have to be made in order to provide their children with the best possible foundations that parents could offer in the post war era.



Antoni and his father (aged 92).

The education of Sotiri and Eftihia children began at home and as parents would always ensure that the values of family, faith, ethics and moral values were instilled into the children.

These foundations would assist them and arm them with the necessary tools to survive in a world that was still recovering.

Suffice to say, one can point to the upheavals within Greece and that the political situation was not what one would consider to be stable. In fact there was much going on that would eventually see Greece re-elect the Monarchy and replace it with a Republic. This however was in the future.

This was the era that Antoni had been born to and he was fortunate that his siblings before him had borne the brunt of the hard years immediately following the war. Antoni's education began at home during his formative years by observing the behaviours of elder siblings and at the same time listening to his parents, relatives and other village elders.



Antoni with members of the Oakleigh Greek Community 2006.

This provided Antoni with the appropriate basic moral values that he holds so dear to this day and has passed them onto his children of the elder children. Antoni therefore was loved by all because of he was the youngest in the family. However being the youngest did not relieve him of his responsibilities within the home and elsewhere within the family unit. As a youngster he carried out many "jobs" like post boy, fruit picking, working in the tobacco fields with his family, helping the local sweet shop make and sell 'halva' at the local festivals.

As Antoni came of school age he like many others of his age was reluctant to attend school and enjoyed the freedom and the companionship of his parents and those of his siblings. Still he was also fortunate to have his elder siblings to take him to and fro the local school and provide him with the necessary educational background foundation to entice him to want to learn more and therefore seek more learning for an ever hungry mind yearning to populate it with knowledge and life experiences.

He attended the local village Primary and Secondary school and still Antoni was not satisfied. He knew that he wanted to achieve much more and that the village could no longer sustain or feed his hunger for more knowledge. They say that God works in mysterious ways and faith alone cannot always give you what you want but that he provides you with the tools that you need to succeed.

Antoni was a bright student it was quite evident that he was forward thinking, logical, had an appreciation for understanding problems and coming up with solutions at an early age. His parents realising that the village and local regional schools were unable to satisfy the educational and knowledge hunger that was gnawing at Antoni's eager mind that they supported him in going to Athens so that he could attend the exams to attend University.

At the ripe "old age" of 18, Antoni had by now outgrown many of his peers in the village and was streets ahead in many ways. It was clear that University and a higher education was the place to start if he was to feed that hunger and thirst for more knowledge.

When he arrived in Athens in 1979, Antoni quickly realised that the knowledge and hunger that he thought he was seeking was not at the university level but more on the commercial side of the business world where all of his knowledge and capacity to see things through to its logical conclusion lay in the business world.

It was decision that Antoni was not to regret as life turned out far rosier than having to study at the University at Athens. Using his meagre knowledge of Athens, Antoni soon became familiar with Athens widespread suburbia, back alleys, the cultural behaviours, cuisine, its people (which were different from the outlying countryside) and struck up many friendship and bonds that he continued to retain as he grew older.

During his time in Athens Antoni the business and the private sector beckoned him like a call to arms. He answered the call and was soon employed within a number of major supermarket chains where his leadership skills were soon recognised and it was not long after that he was appointed assistant manager in various stores around the Athens business and commercial district.

The political scene in Greece at that time had since stabilised and the fledgling Republic had shed its draconian image and had settled into an industrial giant that only attracted the people in the country to seek work in the major cities. Although the depopulation of the countryside was to fill the suburbs of the major cities, many villages were abandoned for a better quality of life in the city.

The major cities of Greece began to rival other cities in Europe but had the additional problems of where to accommodate all the new arrivals and how were they to overcome the problems of their ancient heritage. It was during this time that much damage was done to the Ancient Hellenic past that one wonders how much damage was done during this period. Developer being developer would bypass ancient artefacts or completely bury them before authorities were able to make an impact.

This does not happen today as there are strict guidelines and heavy penalties for those who fail to report ancient finds. Still it was a time of much excitement for Antoni and he like many others of his age group was expected to do his bit for his country by enlisting in the Hellenic Armed Forces. Mind you Antoni had no choice in the matter but he soon was reconciled with the fact that here was another experience where he could demonstrate his leadership potential amongst his peer group.



Antoni in the Army. Therefore when the call up papers came in 1982, Antoni did not shirk his duty and at the age of aged 20 entered the Hellenic Armed Forces.

After going through the normal Health, Physical and psychometric testing that all young enlistees endure, young Antoni was selected for higher leadership Training as a result of the psychometric tests.

They had indicated that he had above average intelligence, the capacity for higher learning and leadership potential.

After completing his initial basic training, he was posted to Senior Non Commissioned Officer Training Army base, which at that time was located at Corinth in the Peloponnese. On completion of a gruelling few long months of training, Antoni emerged as an exceptional soldier who had done extremely well on his course at the senior non commission level and was ready for responsibilities at a higher level.



He was posted to Athens for additional training in Heavy weapons and as a result of his high grades was promoted to sergeant and posted to the border at Evros which was adjacent to Turkey.

Antoni was to undertake 16 months of training, attending war related tactical exercises, where he was able to further demonstrate his abilities to lead men and to remain cool under pressure.

Many of the tactical and war related tasks were conducted near the border with Turkey and it was often comical that soldiers being soldiers no matter what their nationality would be would find ways to kill the boredom and to create an entertainment of their own without causing harm or bringing grief to none or the other side.

This involved both border guards at firing at objects in the river that separated the two countries and have competitions as to who could shoot the best. Other times each side would monitor the other without causing any alarm to one side or the other but merely carry out their duties as prescribed by their superiors.

Other time both sides would occasional shoot at no man's land and wait for the other side to respond. Sometimes these fire fights became a ritual after a while and could be deemed as harmless fun but in reality for an observer who had no knowledge of the local area would think that it was a major border crossing. Soldiers being soldiers would always know when to stop and to move on. Like all good learning experiences in life, they come to an end and Antoni despite a successful career in the two years with the Hellenic Armed Forces was eager to enter the world of business and commerce again.

He knew that the additional leadership knowledge that he had experienced with his time in the Defence Force would hold him in good stead later on in life and in whatever job or venture he took on. Antoni was no fool and was always a good judge of character and he knew how to approach and get the best out of people to get the job done right the first time. His business adventures in life alone would be a standing legacy that others to this day would marvel as to how he was able to achieve success in such a short time.

On arrival back in Athens his previous employer eagerly reemployed him and he continued in his role with the supermarket chain at management level. Although management was fine for Antoni, it could not compare to the responsibilities that he had in The Hellenic Armed Forces and he soon became bored with the challenges that faced him. It appeared that he was without exception, able to foresee problems before they arose and take positive action to bring about a successful conclusion. His appreciation and conflict management skills were not being challenged and he soon became restless.

It came to the point where Antoni stopped work one day in Athens during his break and reflected on his past, what he had achieved so far and what he wanted to achieve for himself on a more personal level. He looked around d him and observed his co-workers going about their busy lives with whatever they were preoccupied with at that time. He noticed that they had all fallen into their comfort zones and just wanted to finish the job, go home, rest and play. There was no ambition amongst this lot he thought to himself and was deep in thought about what direction his life should take.

Antoni apart from his business and commerce knowledge had the additional good fortune to be aware of his personal characteristics and leadership attributes. Leadership, empathy, practicality, a shrewd judge of character, ability to solve problems and the art of influencing others to undertake tasks that did not think was within their skills level.



Antoni today. However despite all his achievements and skills that he had acquired in a short space of time, Antoni wanted more than what life was being offered to him at that particular moment.

His employer had recognised Antoni superior leadership skills being a cut above the rest and advised Antoni that he had a bright future with his firm and with additional hard work could one day become a general manager.

Antoni seriously considered all the options open to him and came to the conclusion that life in Athens and Greece at that was not a place where he could achieve his ambitions in his own way and in his own time.



Antoni was also adventurous and had wanted to see what lay outside the borders of Greece and what else did the world's oyster have to offer. Did it offer pearls of wisdom, grains of sand or was the world's oyster just there to be taken and eaten for what it was worth.

During this period of contemplation Antoni came to the conclusion that his life at Athens could no longer sustain his hunger and like the time when he left his Village, decided upon leaving Greece and to travel to Australia.

He was fortunate again that in Australia, he had an elder sister who had migrated some time earlier and was living in Melbourne Australia. Melbourne in particular was home to the second largest Greek Population after Thessaloniki and Athens of Greece. He had heard many stories about life in Australia and that it only took courage, commitment and the ability to work hard to get ahead.

The challenges and the opportunities appeared to Antoni at this stage to be something that he had always dreamed about. Here was a place where he could muster all of his life's experiences and put them to good use and achieve what he always wanted to in life. Independence, ability to make one's own decisions and to learn more about what life had to offer.

The decision being made, Antoni made the necessary administrative arrangement and purchased himself a ticket of passage to Australia from the funds that he had in reserve. He returned back to his place of birth in the village of Tsaritsani and made his farewells to his parents and relatives that were still living in the village. Prior to leaving his birthplace, Antoni toured the village, revisiting his favourites spots, the village plantations, the main village centre, taking in all the sights, images, smells, thoughts, and voices deep within his soul.



These memories were important to him and he had no intention of breaking or losing them because it was from this village that he had his character develop and made him into the man he was that day.

Back on the bus, after saying his goodbyes, Antoni took one last look at the foothills of Mount Olympus as the bus made its way back to Larisa and from there he took additional public transport to Athens.

Collecting his belongings from his place of abode, he made his way to the international Athens airport which at that time was located near the ocean. Going through customs was not a problem and neither was boarding the aeroplane. It was only when the aeroplane was in the air that Antoni gazed down upon the shores of Hellas that he realised that he was leaving his homeland for Good only God knew for how long.

He could make out the outline of the shores below, the beaches and could still see the people on the ground going about their daily business. Athens was in the midst of a heat wave and August was not always popular because of the intense heat and people were more than often asleep for the mid day siesta rather than being at work.



Antoni with Nick Bantounas - Another Australian Greek who has made good in his adopted country - Australia.

Wistfully he looked away and concentrated on his current surroundings and checked that his seat belt was still fastened around his waist, the air stewardess came around offering refreshments and asked if he was comfortable.

This was Antoni's first major long term air flight and it proved to be a horrendous experience. The aeroplane suffered some major breakdowns which delayed the journey even further which only confused and frustrated the passengers. Many of whom like Antoni had not experienced the long trips on board an aeroplane.

Antoni, in his own words, has often said that he found his first experience of long journeys by an aeroplane a harrowing experience and was not happy with the delays and the breakdowns. Still one has to be thankful for the crew and the experience of the pilots to bring them to the sunny shores of Australia where he was greeted with open arms by his elder sister.

It took about two weeks for Antoni to acclimatise to the weather conditions of Melbourne as it was the exact opposite of the either conditions back home in Greece. It was bitterly cold, windy and it reminded him of his village of birth during the winter time when the frost, wind rain and snow was commonplace during g the winter time. Still, he was glad to be amongst family and soon settled down with his sister's family.

Within weeks, the word had travelled around the Greek circuit in Prahran that a young man had arrived from Greece and that he had made a good impression on those he had contact with. They spoke highly of him and said that this young man would go far in Australia given the opportunities that abounded in the Australian business world at that time.

Antoni was eloquent in speech, manners, cordial and respectful to his elders and quickly displayed an air of confidence that only drew others to his side. Greeks in Australia were quick to size up a man's character by his dress, bearing and his manner towards others. If a Greek took a disliking to you, you might as well go back home and forget that you had even been here. Although Antoni had the air of confidence about him, he was not cocky or surly in his nature; in fact he was charming, witty and could hold his ground in any discussion.



It was within the first few weeks that friends of his sister arrived to meet with the young man and to hear of news from Greece. Like all new arrivals they were expected to tell the Greeks who had been in Australia for some time, what life was like back in the old country.

Antoni was no exception, he spoke about the industrial changes that were occurring in Greece, the depopulation of the Villages, the people thronging to Athens and how quality of life had vastly improved.

Those listening to Antoni wondered whether they had made the right choice in leaving Greece many years before. Still, they had time to return and visit the old country if they wished.



Antonis and Vicky on the marriage. During one of the visits by his sister's friends, a family arrived accompanied by a young 19 year old girl.

Antonis and the young girl were introduced and she was given the task of showing Melbourne to Antoni and to help him to orientate himself during the early stages while he learnt the ropes so to speak.

The young girl's name was called Vicky Sakellaridis and she had been born in Australia to parents who had come after World War 2 and that of the Greek civil war. Vicky introduced Antonio to her friends of the same age and they all went out together enjoying each other's company. Vicky at that time was studying at university to become a teacher. Suffice to say, within three weeks the couple had fallen in love and decided to get engaged. In the early months of 1985 and not too long after their engagement, Vicky and Antoni were married at the local Greek Church in Prahran.

Vicky had wanted to get married at St Demitrios because it was the church that she had gone to when she was young whilst living in Prahran. It was a wonderful start for Antoni in Australia and his decision to migrate was justified. He had come to a whole new world where opportunities to demonstrate his business and commercial ambitions could be realised. He was also very happy that he had met his wife Vicky who also shared his philosophy on life, family and had the same values that he had been brought up.

Within the first year of being in Australia, Antoni wasted no time in being acquainted with the Australian way of life. With the support of his wife Vicky he mastered the Australian English language by attending English language classes at RMIT and worked part time as a cleaner and other odd jobs that he could find to supplement his income. Whilst he was doing both his active mind was at play and he quickly saw that his entrepreneurial ambitions within him grow as time wore on.



With a very short time, Antoni began his own company in the cleaning and maintenance industry. It was not long after completing his English studies that his business grew to the stage where he had to expand it to employ other workers within his company. Business was brisk, life was good and there was plenty of work for anyone willing to take on cleaning of businesses, offices and also the conduct of maintenance projects that only went to enhance his company's image in the world of the cleaning industry.

Contracts were plenty and organisations were vying for his trade. In fact his company went so well as a result of Antoni entrepreneurial and leadership skills that he had to literally reject lucrative offers of additional business prospects. His employees were a happy lot as Antoni was able to draw upon his leadership and management skills that had been honed in his previous life in Greece.



Antoni with committee and Peter Costello at Oakleigh Greek Community. He was a natural leader of men and his employees loved his man management in that he would listen to their problems and this in turn produced loyal employees that actively assisted him in progressing further with the business.

The employees had realised earlier in their interaction with Antonia that he wanted them to achieve and to develop as people first.

In doing so they were actively returning that courtesy by the loyalty to Antoni and subsequently raising the production of the company. Often he played the role of counsellor, financial adviser, and mediator and always helps those in need without ulterior motive.

Antoni was in his element and all of his hard work had paid off. He and wife concentrated on raising a family and over the next few years produced two wonderful boys Sotiri (Christmas day) 1988, Stefano in 1991 and a beautiful daughter named Eftihia in 1994. All of the children are bright, well mannered and have inherited their parent's love of education, family values, morals and work ethics. Vicky and Antoni ensured that their children would receive the best support they could offer and education was a key factor in ensuring that children were being prepared for their future roles in life.



As the years went by and the family unit was complete, the children doing well, Vicky keeping a watchful eye on the family unit, looking after the interests of her family and supporting her husband's attitude and philosophies in life. It was not long before Antoni was restless again and looked around to become involved in community and philanthropic projects that would help him to release the enormous amount of energy that he had and to expand his network of friends and contacts in the community and philanthropic world.



His skills were soon sought after and became involved as a committee member of Ellassona and Districts "Nikotsaras". He was successful and was well respected in his role as councillor, staying on for additional for 8 years and helping the community realise its ambitions. Antoni skills again were recognised by other organisations that soon realised that here was an exceptional individual whose interpersonal skills went beyond the normal range of the Greek community.

That he would be an asset to anyone who had him on their committee. This it was not unseal that Antoni became a founding member of the committee of Panthessalian Association, a task that he soon took on with both hands. During this time his children were growing and he and his wife Vicky took an active interest in the welfare of their children, Antoni also became President of the Parent's and Friends Assoc. at Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College. During this time he became known to many of the Oakleigh Greek Community and was well received by the elders and the young generation alike. His affable and approachable manner only drew more people towards him and this increased his popularity.



Antoni with members of the School Council.

In addition to the above responsibilities he found the time to take on the role of President of the Parent's and Friends Association at the local Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College.

He became involved in the local soccer club. His involvement with soccer club at Caulfield United Junior soccer club was an active one, being elected a committee member, coach and President for 7 years.

During this time, Antoni used his leadership skills wisely and effectively to ensure not only the survival of the club but also introduced new financial procedures that curbed the spending and ensured that the club remained financial. Antoni was not known to be afraid to confront and meet head on any challenge or to be overwhelmed by any obstacle. He would use his leadership skills effectively to ensure that the aspirations and goals of the club were realised.



Antoni on a trip to Greece at (Pilio Volos). There was case where a member was suspected of fraud and it did not take Antoni long to confront him face to face and effectively create an environment where this particular the member was obliged to make good the losses and to move on.

This member has since moved on was last known to be involved as a committee member of another well known Greek organisation. What the member's role is in that particular organisation is not known but should he be involved in any financial role then the organisation is best to check their member's credentials.

Although Antoni was involved in the above organisations, he was also approached by the local Greek community of Oakleigh and districts and seconded onto their committee. During his time on the committee he made many friends, soon realised that the community was in need of a direct injection of suitable people who had the interest of the community and not for self interest. He worked hard within to support the committee and made some headway.

Unfortunately his stay on the management committee was short lived and the following year when elections were held was unable to produce sufficient votes to be elected. This may be seen by others as a setback but Antoni was made of sterner stuff and took defeat gracefully and accepted the community's decision and concentrated on his business while still supporting the community where he could. He attended the community and college dinners, religious festivals and carnivals, memorials and also parted with his money for philanthropic reasons.



Antoni with Prime Minister of Greece on his visit to Australia. The Prime Minister also made a special trip to the Oakleigh Greek Community.

Despite his generosity and support for the community Antoni did not seek any accolades but preferred to remain in the back ground and by his quiet nature achieved more in this manner.

Many in the community have underestimated him, his skills, motivation and his aspirations. Still Antoni is happy to move with the tide, not making any waves if necessary and allowing the course of nature to take its natural course. His interests in pursuing the wellbeing of the community of Oakleigh and districts are based on purely Hellenic reasons as he has no wish for the community and its assets to become a byword in the future.



Antoni with close family members.

He is well aware of the sacrifices made by families, many of whom are his personal friends and those of the elders who sacrificed much of their personal time to achieve what is currently in place today. In addition Antoni is an active supporter of his Greek orthodox faith and realises the importance of the church can play in being involved in the affairs of the community.

After all, it's difficult to separate a Greek of today from his Greek Orthodox faith. Although the world is in recession and Australian government is currently trying to cushion its people against the harsh realities of what is to come. Antoni is well prepared to take on additional responsibilities if need be, His business inserts are based on solid foundations, his family is well and their lives are accelerating at the level commensurate with their age.

Antoni also find the time to travel to Europe at least every twelve months and he loves to read in both English and Greek. He takes an enormous amount of interest in his children's welfare, often leaving work to be with them at school or to attend any school activities, play sports with them in addition to assisting in coaching them in any sport event.



Antoni & friends at the Defence Reserves Support Council Awards evening

At other times you would often see Antoni with his children, walking, watching movies, helping them with any problem, gardening in the his back to remind him of his village origins. Entertaining his friends at his home, and to gather like all the Greeks in the coffee shops of Oakleigh, drinking coffee with his friends, solving the problems of the world.

Lately Antoni has become involved in supporting the Australian Defence force with emphasis on the Defence Reserves and has been noticed to frequent Defence functions in support of Australian Armed Forces. Again one could say that Antoni restless mind is at work on how he can assist or support other using his skills and vast network of contacts.

On reflection an observer may well say with some degree of certainty that Antoni is a well balanced, affable man whose life has been blessed with good fortune, surrounded a loving and supporting wife, loving children and surrounded by enclave of great friends. His decision to leave Greece in 1984 was based on solid and practical reflection of his life at that time which has paid off.

Antoni personal beliefs are that he hopes that his achievements in life shall be those that he has fought, for what was right and fair. He also believes that what he has risked for in life is something that mattered and that he was willing to give help to those who are in need.

He is a realist and is the first to admit that God has taken good care of him and that when he is finally gone from this place on earth that he hopefully can leave it in a far better position than when he first arrived. His favourite saying from C. Hoppe is as shown below: "To have lived and left the earth a better place for what I've done and who I've been" – C. Hoppe and that "One person with belief is equal to ninety-nine who have only interests of value."

The future is equally bright despite the world recession, he has accumulated much experience in the field of human relations, leadership skills and above all has vast store of energy that only requires a challenge and major projects that could well do with his support. Where Antoni next venture or project may turn to is anyone's guess, but any organisation, community or individual that has the support of Antoni and his skills is sure to do well.



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