

UNDER THE SHADE OF THE OLIVE TREES

Peter Adamis Abalinx 9 February 2017



Under the shade of the olive trees is a somewhat misleading title when I originally wrote the article based on the word JAB. JAB may appear a funny title for an article but for me I am hoping that it will be the embryo of a book. A book that will span more than half a century and as my mates continually to tell me, get off your arse and write the bastard. I must confess it is somewhat daunting and I am wondering whether I will be up to the task. I did promise myself that while I was languishing in hospital in 20165 and 2016 that I would dedicate whatever time I had left to writing about my mates, our generation and of a bygone era.

However in saying that, I feel that I would be writing my epitaph and that I have been putting it off for so long that I am now confused and delirious at the same time at the prospect of writing. I follow a number of friends on social media who have successfully written books and in all cases their writings skills put mine to shame. Mind you, I would not be writing to make money but to leave some form of legacy behind that we too roamed this earth.

Well before readers get off on the wrong foot and travel down a journey that leads nowhere, allow me to elaborate upon the word JAB and why I selected it. When I was first approached to write a book some years ago, I came up with the title "AN ORDINARY BLOKE". I said to myself, what if the contents were not well received, how do I structure it, how do I communicate my feelings, thoughts, emotions and description of what I wanted the reader to understand. As a result I continually put it off and procrastinated in writing. Instead I began to write articles instead so that I can draw upon them at a later time and back the book up with evidence, reference, quotes, extracts, data and other relevant material that will give the book some credibility. After all who wants to read a book about a bloke?

So what does JAB mean. Based on the above paragraph it is not hard to figure it out. JAB is an acronym for "JUST A BLOKE" and I like it because it is unpretentious and down to earth. In laconic terms it is simple, typical Aussie and indication that the book will contain sufficient Australian banter, humour and mischievous yarns to make the reader feel at home and put a smile to ones face. If I can achieve that then I am on the right track free of any low self-esteem emotions or feelings of the tall poppy syndrome. I am hoping that come April, I begin the process of writing under the shade of two olive trees at my parent's cottage in Pellana, Lakonia, Greece and the original home of Helen of Troy before she was abducted by the Trojan.

I have stated before elsewhere that whilst serving in the Australian Army, I would pass the time writing in my journals, letters back home, and diaries and at every opportunity that I had. I am of the belief that I picked up the bug from my Grandfather who had travelled to the USA in 1911 with his sister Giannoula (Jane, Jenny or whatever other anglicised names can be wrought from the Greek name). Grandfather Peter was not one to give up easily and during his time in the USA, he mastered six languages, built a business, became a wrestler and even a hotel detective whatever that meant.

Although he returned to the old country and unable to return back to the USA because he failed to take out US citizenship, he did make a number of small fortunes to set himself up back home. On reflection I must admit that two of those fortunes were whittled away by mismanagement and unfortunate trust in relatives close to home. Grandfather's story is an enormous yarn in itself and I must add that the legacy he left behind was not wasted on his children. I say that because many of his stories and achievements were handed to us orally and as a result we as his grandchildren endeavoured to emulate him. My story is therefore as a direct result of Grandfather's influence through third party representations. I hope that I don't let him down.

However despite all of the above, the yarn becomes more entangled in the societal fabrics of countries such as Australia, USA, Canada, Britain, Germany, Russia, New Zealand, South Africa and many other far flung places too numerous to mention. There are many stories and yarns that have already been written about the struggles, triumphs, achievements and sorrow experienced by those who left the homeland post World War 2 and the horrors of the Greek Civil war. A civil war that is still felt amongst the Greeks in the villages, towns and major cities that may be found within the borders of Hellas. In hindsight, I guess that this will be no different and readers will have heard and read it all before. Still, who knows, I may just get the opportunity to crack a smile on someone's face.

The stories will include the clans of the mountain villages, stories of the "Klephte" (cattle rustlers, brigands, thieves, bandits) as well as yarns that would today be looked upon with disapproving scowls or raised eyebrows. Then again who are we to judge them, when those who colonised this nation did not do so without shedding the blood of the indigenous by the using various means of extermination. Yes we here in Australia have our skeletons and although we do not hide them, we don't have much to crow about when we try and preach to other nations about their way of life.

What I do like about the Australian way of life is that we love a good banter, taking the mickey out of a clobber, testing their sense of humour, calling a spade a spade and not giving a hoot when a bloke breaks his leg. After all we all laugh at each other and that's a healthy sign of any society. If we in Australia can chuckle at our own expense, then I am hoping that when I put pen to paper, the reader will take it as it comes. It is what it is and it is no use hiding behind the bushes or stand in the way of a good yarn.

Now that I gibbered enough, I will return back to the scribes table (computer) and belt out a few notes on the best way forward. As always, I am hoping for constructive feedback and any contributions will be most welcome. For example: "Warrie" George Mansford, once told me a yarn about when he was young bloke serving in Victoria. He remembers well, being at the old Watsonia Barracks in the early Nineteen Fifties and being ordered along with other young soldiers to evict squatter refugees who had refused to budge from the Nissan huts that dotted the Watsonia Army Barracks landscape at the time.

"Warrie" George said to me that he was not happy about doing that as he felt sorry for the refugees who in some cases were displaced refugees and others were New Australians who had made Australian home. They had nowhere to go and were being forcibly evicted. Yes we have come a long way we Australians and yet we still become agitated when we are confronted with something alien to our way of life. That's life I guess.

Another contribution which is worth mentioning is how we treat mates when they are down and out. When I was in hospital for cancer and the prognosis was not good, mates from some 40 years ago came out of the woodwork to wish me well and to hang in there and not to give up. I remember Phil "Butch" Buttigieg, an old Platoon Sergeant contacting me and giving me some encouragement. He gave me a poem to read, which I memorised during the crucial phases of the cancer treatment. Peter Hatherley was another to make the trip and visit me, Bob Buchanan, another, Ken Tsirigotis, Kon Glekas and others contacted me from overseas and sent words of encouragement.

This is what I have always written about in previous articles that just when a bloke is down, all of a sudden mates crop up. Now I have written this second contribution on purpose because right at this very moment there are mates out there who are suffering silently and only a few are reaching out to us. One recently wrote on social media and I must say that I am glad that he did as it can happen to all of us. Depression in this case should not be underestimated. I know as I have been there and it is not an easy road with family, friends and mates.

I would prefer to believe that I have not misled the readers regarding the article when after all it is about all of us and I will once again put out the “cooee” for help in asking for contributions while I sit under the shade of the olive trees in Greece typing away the many yarns and stories on the trusty old laptop whose keyboard has faded and using memory to identify the keys. With regards to clobber digger mates who are suffering as a result of illness, ailments, chronic pain absence of loved ones or disagreements, to hang in there as the world is still a beautiful place.

Always put things into perspective and remember that no matter how bad things look today, it will get better with time. The sun will still shine, it will still rain, the wind still blows and nature being nature will bring about the elements for us to endure. Never give up. This is dedicated to Larry, Bret, Mick, Barry, Bill, Tom Noel, Barrie, Maurice, Toni, Peter and many others far too numerous to mention. You are not alone.

In closing, the past ten years have not been kind to me and while 2015 and 2016 for me were years of reflection, treatment and recovery. I have tried not to dwell on the negativity of life or what could have been, but to ensure that whatever time we have left is not squandered in futile objectives that lead to nowhere. I intend to make life more meaningful and worthwhile, worthy of those who had a hand in making me who I am today. Life as we know it can only be sustained by vigilance and with that vigilance comes responsibility. Let us hope that 2017 is a good one. Take care, be strong and allow yourself the luxury of being happy without feeling selfish.



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