

Tess Mallos (nee, Anastasia Calopades) is an Australian food and cooking, writer, journalist, author, and commentator. She has written a number of books on Greek and Middle Eastern cuisine.

Biography

Her parents, both from the Greek island of Kythera, emigrated to Australia where she was born and raised in the country town of Casino, New South Wales. Her father, Andonis

Calopades arrived in Australia at the turn of the 20th century as an 11 year old, and worked in the famous Kominos cafe in the central business district of Sydney. In 1919, he moved to Casino, where he ran the Marble Bar Cafe. Her mother was Calliope Manolliaras.

Tess began her writing career in cooking as a freelance food consultant in advertising, creating and writing recipes for a wide range of food as well as preparing food for photography. Her first book in 1976 was the Greek Cook Book,

which featured familiar recipes from her Greek heritage. Many books followed featuring recipes gathered from cuisines in the Mediterranean, Middle East and North Africa. Tess worked as Food Consultant to the Australian Meat Board, where she has written editorials on meat cooking for some 80 publications throughout Australia, and 20 overseas countries. She has also demonstrated her recipes in cooking segments on a number of Australian television cooking shows. Tess has three children.

Super Greek

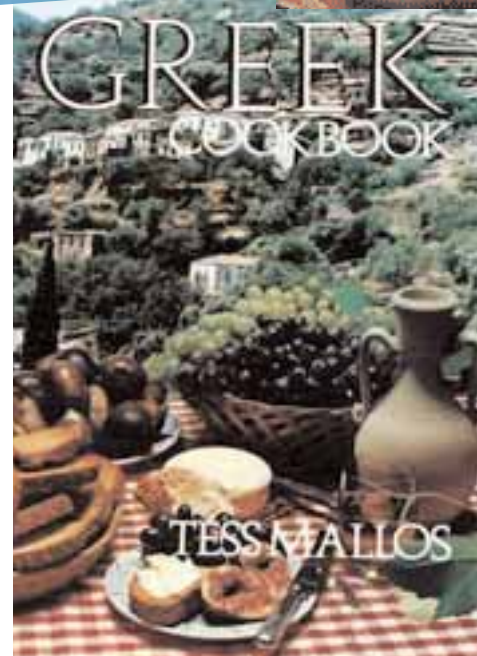
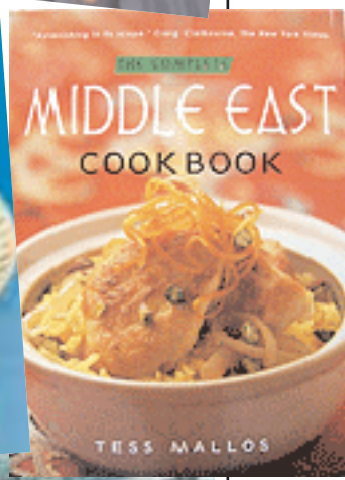
Tess Mallos arrives for lunch bearing a book. Not one of her many cook-books (she's written umpteen, many of which have become international bestsellers), but a simple blue hardcover volume with the stamped gold title Life in Australia 1916. It is, as one might guess, a kind of social history, but a very particular one, recently translated into English. It's a record of Greek migration to Australia, a roll-call of those enterprising and hard-working new citizens who established successful businesses, almost all food-related, throughout this country.

Many came, as did Antonios Calopades and Calliope Manolliaras, from the Ionian island of Kythera, the birthplace of Aphrodite, goddess of love. Calopades first worked in the celebrated Cominos Fish Shop on Oxford Street in Sydney in 1897 — he was only 11 years old when he arrived. After kick-starting his career in Sydney and country towns, he moved to Casino where he opened the Marble Bar Cafe and then married Manolliaras in 1930. A baby girl, Anastasia, was later born in the same NSW town. Given that Australian tongues have difficulty negotiating polysyllables, many Greek-Australians anglicised their names, and so it was that Anastasia Calopades, after marrying, morphed into Tess Mallos, one of the best-known and most influential figures in the Australian food industry.

Her celebrity persists. When we arrive at the popular Medusa Greek Taverna in Sydney's CBD, the proprietor, Peter Koutsopoulos, produces a copy of Mallos's *The Greek Cookbook*, published in 1976, and still a bible for lovers of Greek food. Second-hand copies sell online for up to \$100.

With images of rough-hewn lamb floating in a turbid sea of oil and tomato — as served in the restaurant of the old Hellenic Club, on the corner of Park and Elizabeth streets, Sydney, decades before its relocation to more upscale premises — still hovering in my gastro-memory, I ask Mallos why, for years, Greek food has had such a bum rap. "It was the oil," she says. "Australians equated olive oil

with the dreaded castor oil dispensed to children for medicinal purposes. If you wanted olive oil, only Faudling's was available in small bottles from the chemist. How-



ever, my mother had her supplies shipped in four-gallon drums from Italian producers in Griffith.' As for the vegetables essential to proper Greek cooking, Mallos recalls that one had to grow them or go without, especially in country towns. "Seeds were diligently saved. When Mum, or a relative, lost her seeds for, say, okra or aubergine, they would write to each other for replacements. It was a boom time for His Majesty's mail."

Mallos was to become instrumental in dispelling some of the negative perceptions and limitations of Greek cooking. It all started with the publication of *The Greek Cookbook*, but given Mallos's potent combination of ambition and culinary evangelism, it was only a matter of time before she ranged further afield and began producing books on Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and North African cuisines.

When Mallos first hit the local food scene, she was designated, as was the quaint custom of the times, as a "home economist". In 1961, her sister Ellen, who was employed as a home economist for the advertising agency Jackson Wain, needed her help with a presentation lunch designed to win an account for the Rice Marketing Board. The lunch, attended by Margaret Fulton, was a success and the rest, as they say, is history. Mallos went on to work as a freelance food consultant, preparing food for photography and television commercials, and developing recipes for many food companies — honing the skills which led to writing cookbooks, the first of which was *The Australian Book of Meat Cookery*, in 1972.

Mallos also became something of a tele-

vision personality, fronting five-minute segments on commercial channels. Was she the Maria Callas of cuisine? "Not really, but I do have the Greek melodrama gene," she says, "and I always tried to make the segments lively." She also claims, with a wise smile, that "by passing on traditional Greek recipes, I think I saved a lot of Greek marriages."

Although now largely retired from the food scene, Mallos is still highly regarded. The late Craig Claiborne, pioneering American restaurant critic, food writer and food editor of *The New York Times*, was an admirer, and only last year, in the same august journal, travel writer Seth Sherwood nominated *The Complete Middle East Cookbook* as one of his gastronomic bibles.

Australians have every right to be proud of Mallos's many contributions to our culinary melting pot, as indeed does she. Particularly telling is her ongoing popularity in the USA. Barnes & Noble currently offers a swathe of her cookbooks for sale. So if the Hellenic community is planning another publication to mark the centenary of *Life in Australia 1916*, and celebrate the contribution Greeks have made to our culture, two things are certain: it will include more women (the original was pretty much an all-male affair), and prima inter pares* will be the former Anastasia Calopades.**

Tess Mallos transformed the way Australians perceive Greek cuisine.

Leo Schofield*** tracks her journey from cook to culinary evangelist.

***Leo Schofield is a prominent figure in Australian public life, largely in the field of the Arts. He is also a broadcaster, a bon vivant, and a gastronomist.

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