



Year 6 Greek School class 1970 with their teacher Mrs Kourtis



Committee of the Hellenic Youth Society University of NSW [1976/77]



Painting exhibition at the Kastellorizian Club organised by the Hellenic Youth Society of the University of NSW. Greek student Maria Costadopoulos stands beside her art work. [1975]

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people thought and felt and why they made the decisions they did. It is too easy to condemn people's actions in the past based on values and attitudes of the present. A good historian doesn't do this. They put themselves in the other person's shoes to truly comprehend them. I believe that history is a very important subject because it helps us understand ourselves and gives us information on how to deal with the future – so we don't repeat the mistakes of the past.

What part of history fascinates you the most and why?

I am very interested in the Second World War. I grew up with my mother singing the war songs of Sophia Vembo, the Vera Lynn of Greece. I think this is what triggered my fascination with the topic. It was such a traumatic time for everyone that it brought out the best and the worst in people and I admire how people coped with what they had to endure. Studying World War II enabled me to understand what makes me Greek. Suddenly I had to explain in *Diggers and Greeks* what it was about the Greeks that appealed to the Australians. Writing this book helped me understand why my parents were the way they were and why they behaved the way they did - it was all part of being Greek.

Tell me what you think made you the person you are?

I think my Greek upbringing and the decisions I took made me the person I am, because we are not entirely a product of our background and upbringing. I grew up in Newtown and attended Greek school three afternoons a week at the Newtown School of Arts and did Greek dancing there with Miss Sia Karela. I had my debut in 1971 at the Arcadian Ball. I regularly went to the movies at Enmore Theatre and grew up watching Aliki Vougiouklaki, Martha Vourthsi, Niko Xenopoulos, Zoi Laskari etc and eating pasteli. I spoke Greek at home and regularly went to church at St Constantine and Helen with my best friend Helen Nicolaou, now Helen Economou. I have fond memories of my high school years. I rarely experienced bullying and I think this is because I had a Greek circle of friends who attended my book launch on Tuesday 6 April and told me how proud they were of me and what I had achieved.

What are your plans for the future?

I'm seeking sponsorship to translate my book into Greek. So I would like to hear from anyone who is interested in assisting me. I am also looking for a film producer who would like to turn *Diggers and Greeks* into a feature film, similar in quality to *Breaker Morant* produced by Bruce Beresford. This would be a good way of ensuring that the Greek and Crete campaigns are not forgotten. I am also working on a teaching kit for schools so that teachers will have material readily available to teach the Greek and Crete campaigns, which was one of the major reasons I decided to do my PhD on this topic.

How did you feel at the launch of your book?

I was overwhelmed and very proud of what Bob Carr said about *Diggers and Greeks*. I was also very moved by the number of people who attended and personally thanked me for writing the book.

Do you regret giving up your career as a teacher to write this book?

Definitely not! This was my dream and I have achieved it. I feel very proud and happy. What makes it all worthwhile are the daily emails I receive telling me how much they have enjoyed reading my book. Usually they are from people who had a parent, uncle, grandfather that fought in Greece and on Crete. It makes me feel that what I have written is important to people.

What disappoints me however, is when I am asked if I am Cretan as if that is relevant. I reply, 'no, I am Greek. Last time I looked, Crete was part of Greece.' We should look beyond our region, island or village and embrace the bigger picture. We need to see the war on Greek mainland and on Crete as an important part of Greek and Australian history that links our two nations together and as such warrants remembrance and commemoration.

What is it that motivates you to follow your dream?

I have always had a thirst for knowledge and have never been afraid to ask the difficult questions and to answer them. I love learning and teaching.