

THEO & TESS CONSTANTINOU - ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΟΥΜΕ!

It might be old news now, but when on 22nd June, I read Eleni Dales loving words on the retirement of her parents, the former proprietors and publishers of 'Kosmos', Theo and Tess Constantinou, I felt a little uneasy. Mainly because our favourite Greek/Australian newspaper would be changing ownership and that the 'Kosmos' as we knew it could change dramatically without the fair and steady guidance of Theo and Tess. After a quiet chat with Tess I felt glad that Theo and Tess had chosen the right time for them to retire and knew that they would have entrusted the iconic 'Kosmos' enterprise to worthy guardians.

I also knew that Theo and Tess, "never ones to let grass grow under their feet", would now plan other interesting things to occupy the next stage of their fascinating life together. A familiar Greek saying came to mind, "Ma Kala, then halase o Kosmos"; something Theo Constantinou might say to anyone else who was apprehensive about passing their publishing "world" to suitable new hands.

I had the great pleasure of meeting both Theo and Tess during a printing project several years ago. I was immediately impressed by their ethics and sincerity, in both business and personal friendships. I was pleasantly surprised at their singular "apartness" from other Greek/Australians of a high public profile. During their proprietorship of 'Kosmos', Theo and Tess extended genuine opportunities for publishing "without fear or favour", for many local and international amateur and professional writers and advertisers. Their relaxed demeanor yet firm business sense earning them respect and loyalty from their staff and new acquaintances.

Theo and Tess extended me the privilege of being associated with the unique bilingual magazine which they introduced to our print media-starved Greek/Australians, under the very strong and hilarious navigation of the talented Savvas Limnatis. This was the eagerly awaited 'Epsilon'. "El Savvas" IT skills, extensive journalistic

style and event savviness elevated 'Epsilon' into a fortnightly must read. His humane and indulgent Profile series was both beneficial and benevolent to the Greek Community of Sydney. Such a venture could not have happened without the foresight and generous mentorship of Theo and Tess Constantinou. Maybe the 'Epsilon' concept was slightly ahead of its time. Perhaps

'Kosmos's' new owners might consider reviving this publication for the pleasure of future generations?

Under Theo and Tess's management 'Kosmos' evolved into a true Community newspaper. I know that many Greek/Australians over 50 who did not have formal Greek language education, began to buy "Kosmos" and were impressed by the articles they read. 'Kosmos' printed news of the world which was of real interest to the public; also we read about the quiet achievers and scientific visionaries who had migrated here as children of the Diaspora; we were introduced to the lives and motivations of Greek poets and philosophers through book launches, festival programs and theatre reviews; the efforts led by passionate Greek/Australians to restore the Parthenon marbles to Greece as well as the latest soccer scores.

Many readers have expressed that it is the only Sydney secular newspaper that people of my generation are informed about the happenings of our diverse "paroikia". The articles in English were partly responsible for this. Every year 'Kosmos' helped promote and celebrated with us our major national days, our Greek Orthodox "yiortes" and victorious milestones. Front page headlines were usually about politics! What else for us Greeks! Who can forget the Olympic celebrations and the joy we all shared; the feelings of overwhelming pride on seeing pictures of familiar Greek/Australians relay the Olympic torch on its way to the Sydney Stadium in 2000. And even more surging emotion and a state of "belonging" during the hugely successful and classy opening of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games.

And now we read in Greek how it came about that Australia has its first female Prime Minister!

'Kosmos' published annual reminders which have helped to sustain the importance of cultural, Greek Orthodox religious and family traditions for all the Greek community, which now stands as an integral bloc for the progress and vitality of a 21st century Australia.

'Kosmos' local content has been invaluable. Over the years we have anticipated the forthright Greek articles on "community capers" by the respected senior columnist, Mr George Hatzivasilis. Sensing the ill fates descending upon the land of our ancestors over the last few years, Mr Hatzivasilis has written some very hard "home truths" about Greek attitude and practices which many of our compatriots might have found difficult to accept. But they had to be said This man of common sense, had a sense of urgency in his pleas to steer us, as descendants of an ancient and proud "democracy", away from the tragic hubris, and precious pretentiousness that he saw festering amongst us.

My wavering faith in humankind has often been restored as I read Mr Hatzivasilis's frank opinions and support of educational causes, especially the retention of a Greek language faculty at our universities. His relentless and often "tongue in cheek" crusades against the "tsamba touristes" amused and informed many readers, who were ignorant of the goings on in our "paroikia". He felt sad and ashamed that this "freebie phenomenon" which overtook certain entrenched Greek/Australian community organizations, was being funded by the average, hardworking Greeks back home. How prophetic were his words!!!

Mr Hatzivasilis has proven to be a contemporary Greek/Australian, a man of integrity and deep belief in the right to freedom of speech and a balanced debate. He has often written that he has had the full support of Theo and Tess Constantinou during his efforts to "say

it like it is". How refreshing to hear that such people of good intent and influence still exist as role models for our younger generations.

Theo and Tess's impartiality and lack of political correctness have proven to be bridge builders on many important issues influencing publishing during times of great debates and schisms boring away at the community's foundations. They have walked amongst powerful giants of industry and the arts; yet they have not lost "the human factor". The people's love and appreciation for their unbiased contribution to an intelligent Greek print media and efforts to unite the community at large is evident by the warm reception afforded Theo and Tess at every private and public event.

Over the years my association with Tess in particular has grown through our common threads, such as acknowledgment of our beginnings, value of hard work, love of the written word, and (King Street, Newtown - you had to live it to believe it!), to one of warm friendship, mainly due to this gentle yet knowing lady's unpretentiousness and genuine interest in people and all things around her. Yes, Eleni, your parents are an amazing force to be reckoned with, Theo the jovial raconteur/businessman, lovingly supported by the soft diplomacy of Tess.

Having also met the family working together "at the coalface" - Theo, Tess, their two lovely, bright daughters and sons-in-law, I marveled at the respectful ease and competence with which the two "palikaria" strengthened the family operation. Anyway, that's how I saw it. To the new directorship, I wish great success and innovation, and the same fair mindedness and unity espoused by your predecessors.

To the dynamic duo, Theo and Tess, I wish you great health, relaxation and many fun ventures and adventures ahead with the ever growing family. And Happy Holidays!

And on behalf of my generation, Thank You.

Georgia (Hatzaras) Wright
10 August 2010

BRISBANE ARTIST MICHAEL ZAVROS HAS WON \$150,000 IN AUSTRALIA'S MOST LUCRATIVE PORTRAIT PRIZE

Fear and death inspired winning study of human frailty

FOR his five-year-old daughter, Phoebe, it was a just a game. But Michael Zavros's inspiration for painting Phoebe is Dead/McQueen, for which he has won \$150,000 in Australia's most lucrative portrait prize, was deadly serious.

After becoming a parent he was haunted by thoughts of the calamity that could befall his children, the Brisbane artist said yesterday. "I imagined confronting this fear and whether I would sate it somehow or diminish it."

In doing so, he depicted her draped with a skull-covered scarf by Alexander McQueen - a designer he admired, who committed suicide this year - as a metaphor for how "art is long and life is short".

"It's a very confronting work ... but it's also quite playful," Zavros, 35, said. "It was important that her cheeks were rosy, that there was a flush of life in this body. And that there was always ... that question that this child could be playing dead."

The two judges in the Doug Moran National Por-



Playing dead . . . the Brisbane artist Michael Zavros - and his five-year-old daughter, Phoebe - in front of his painting Phoebe is Dead/McQueen. Photo: Edwina Pickles

trait Prize were taken by the painting's duality. "To us it flipped between a child playing and the reality, and that was really what gave it that poignancy and

why, in the end, it was our winner," said one, Alan Dodge.

The Herald's art critic, John McDonald, said Zavros's anxiety about his children's welfare was common to all parents, "so in a sense it's the human condition, but it's still a disturbing picture".

Thirty-five finalists were drawn from more than 650 entries. The \$80,000 first prize in the Moran Contemporary Photographic Prize went to Herald contributor Dean Sewell for the second year running for Cockatoo Is. Ferry, a black-and-white slice of life of people aboard a Sydney Harbour ferry. It captured the reality and honesty of a moment in time and "oozes feeling", said the prize's judge, Stephen Dupont. Sewell, 38, said it was "a deceptively simple picture but there's a lot of complexities in it".

The finalists will be on display at the State Library until September 5, with free entry.

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