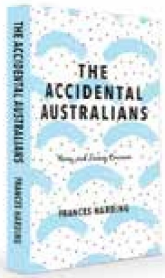


The Accidental Australians Book Review

by Maria Tzannes



In 1985 Frances Harding and her husband, Gordon, and their eight children moved to Charleville in Western Queensland and became the freehold owners of the Hotel Corones until 2001. They had no idea of what they had just bought into and what they would discover. Frances, in particular, was soon to be taken by the story

behind the building of the hotel to the point that she has spent the last 25 years on a journey of discovery to uncover the story of the 'Accidental Australians' who immigrated from Kythera to become some of the most famous people in Queensland and recognised by all of Australia. Yet their story is hardly known and she set out to set that right.

I similarly came across the same story when I visited Charleville in 2017 and I wrote about the story in the Kytherian Newsletter in November of that year for the same reason. So it is with much pleasure that I review the book so beautifully and lovingly written by Frances who has now become a personal friend because of our common interest in the Hotel Corones story.

Harry and Jimmy Corones (Coroneos), originally from the town of Frilingianika in Kythera, were meant to emigrate to America but ended up in Australia instead. The author movingly captures the moments when they landed in Sydney knowing no one and how Harry then aged 23 left his



Harry Corones

nephew, Jimmy, a boy of 11, to sit on their suitcases at the wharf all day while Harry went to find someone, anyone, who could connect them to the Greek community. This beginning will immediately resound with those who have heard the stories of our parents and grandparents who came to Australia from Greece.

The author describes the long hours and drudgery of working in Greek-run shops where the newly arrived workers would sleep for a few hours each night on a mattress on the floor in the back of the shop. Eventually Harry and Jim make their way to Brisbane and, showing entrepreneurial promise, they were 'staked' by relatives, as commonly occurred in those days amongst Kytherians, and were able to purchase a run-down café in Charleville, Queensland.



Hotel Charleville

Their business acumen was soon recognised by a representative of a brewery and they soon found themselves as licensees of the Hotel Charleville. From there they purchased another Hotel in Charleville and subsequently demolished it and began to build, in stages, the most magnificent hotel and ball room anywhere outside of Brisbane, the Hotel Corones, which still stands today. From the 1920s' – 1970's, Harry and Jimmy Corones and the Hotel Corones were right in the middle of the major stories and developments of Australia including playing a significant role in the founding of Qantas and the provision of meal services, the war effort, and were at the heart of everything that moved in Western Queensland.

Harry's personality and business acumen looms large throughout the book and one can easily recognise traits with our own parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts who immigrated from Kythera. The author's moving descriptions of the fears, doubts and bravery of young men leaving family, friends and everything they knew to come to Australia and to work as hard as they did; to form visions and ambitions and then to carry them out, will touch and inspire the reader and this alone makes the book a compulsory read for our young people who



Hotel Corones / (Hotel Charleville)

may not know or realise what it meant to do that in an era where there were no supports for migrants as there are today.

‘The Accidental Australians’ is also a social history of the decades of the 20’s through to the 80’s. It is set amongst monumental events that changed Australia such



Harry Corones and Nancy Bird

as the founding of Qantas and the arrival in Charleville of the first aviators from England on their way to the finish such as the Smith brothers and Amy Johnson, all of whom were guests of Harry Corones at the Hotel Corones. During World War II there were over 3000 American servicemen situated at the airport at Charleville and the ballroom of the Hotel Corones hosted dances almost every night. There are descriptions of weddings, various balls, the picnic races and the deals done amongst wool traders in the luxurious foyer of hotel. Harry Corones and the Hotel Corones are right in the centre of all of these events. It also describes life in a hot, dusty country town without running water or airconditioning but with plenty of flies.



Harry Corones and his wife

As the decades pass, the book describes how things changed with the advent of reliable cars, sealed roads, air travel, television, motels and the collapse of the wool industry. The author also describes many iconic Australian characters that Harry and Jimmy interacted with and there are many tales of how they worked easily alongside loyal employees. This is one of the finest examples of ‘multiculturalism’ and migrant integration into a host country. It also chronicles the role that wives played alongside their husbands in business. Any person who was born and raised in a county town to Greek parents or whose parents worked together in a business



Harry Corones with his sons George and Peter will easily relate to this aspect of the book and many Kytherians will also relate to some unique Kytherian ‘traits’ that Harry displayed.

The book is a real page turner and it is difficult to put it down. It is written in an easy, folksy style. The author has put 25 years into researching the many stories that were told to her and she interviewed over 60 people so that she could get first hand accounts of Harry, Jimmy, their families, where they came from and what drove them to such success. She has combined the Harry and Jimmy Corones story against the backdrop of Australia’s story and turned it into an epic. This is a book that belongs on every Kytherian families’ bookshelf and many other bookshelves besides.



Frances Harding

The book is published by Independent Ink and can be obtained through www.francesharding.com at a cost of \$30.000 plus postage and handling.