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## A Conversation with Justice Emiliou Kyrrou *Inspiring cultural preservation*

A collaboration between the Antipodes Festival and Food for Thought Network

*"By asking people to call me Emiliou, I reclaimed my identity. This was an important step along the path of acknowledging – and later embracing – my Greek heritage", Justice Emiliou Kyrrou*

Over 250 people filled The Wheeler Centre on Saturday 7 September where Supreme Court Judge Emiliou Kyrrou was profiled as part of the The Food for Thought Network's Inspiring People Series and the Antipodes Festival's annual program of cultural events. The outcomes of this successful collaboration were evident in not only the volume of people that attended, but also in the diversity that was represented.

The idea for an in conversation event with Justice Kyrrou, the only Greek-born judge to have been appointed to the Supreme Court of Victoria, was born over six months ago, following the publication of Justice Kyrrou's highly personal book *Call Me Emiliou*. Tracing not only his family's history, the book also reveals the shared hardships faced by an entire generation of Greek migrants, and how those adversities motivated those Greeks to succeed in Australian society. What is echoed throughout book is the desire to maintain culture and preserve connections to heritage.

Representing the GOCMV, in her role as the newly appointed co-chair of the Contemporary Greek Cultural Centre Advisory Committee was Melbourne barrister Olyvia Nikou S.C, an avid supporter of the Antipodes Festival's activities and an advocate for the promotion of initiatives that will entice younger generations to embrace their Greek heritage. Referring to the recent appointment of Jorge Menidis as the Director of the Contemporary Greek Cultural Centre, and the inclusion of professionals from arts, academic and business backgrounds to the Advisory Committee, Nikou was excited to highlight that "The cultural centre's aim is to nurture and showcase innovative cultural events which respond to the evolving interests of 2nd and 3rd generation Greek Australians as well as to engage the broader community of any and all ethnic backgrounds".

Founder of the Food for Thought network Varvara Ioannou discussed the relevance of the event to the Inspiring People Series, initiated by the network in 2001. Justice Kyrrou was an ideal candidate, a Greek migrant who has achieved notable career success despite the disadvantages that came with 'growing up Greek' in the 1970's. being an incredibly powerful role model and inspiration to all of us. "She assured everyone that they were in for a very good night as we profile one of Australia's rare and precious diamonds, our own Greek Australian Supreme Court Judge"

Professor Nikos Papastergiadis, co-chair of the Contemporary Greek Cultural Centre Advisory Committee moderated the evening, providing an all -important thread between speakers. Professor Papastergiadis also spent some time discussing issues of identity and cultural preservation, which arise in *Call Me Emiliou*.

Conducting the Q&A with Justice Emiliou Kyrrou was Eyvah Dafaranos, wife of Greek Ambassador Harris Dafaranos but also a poet in her own right. Moving through a number of questions about Justice Kyrrou's childhood and journey towards becoming a Supreme Court Judge, the discussion raised issues of racism and discrimination, but also those of resilience and overcoming prejudice to succeed. Justice Kyrrou is passionate about "sharing our parents' and our own life experiences with our children and grandchildren, so that we can enrich their lives by giving them a deeper appreciation of their families, their culture and their roots".

He also went on to emphasise "the importance of Greek Australians not being insular about their Hellenism. We must do more to establish links with organisations in Greece and Hellenic organisations in other parts of the world. Our view of Greece should not only be historical and holiday-focused but should be contemporary and vibrant". Melbourne writer and publisher Helen Nickas, spoke about the significance of memoirs and the way they reveal histories and also retain cultural memory. She had this to say to second and third generations, "Please write your stories. You may not think they are interesting enough but, for history's sake, they are".



The Greek Ambassador Mr Harris Dafaranos spoke after the discussion that followed stressing the importance of such events and his delight in the fruitful collaboration of the two organisations and their contribution.

We wish to thank all staff and volunteers who contributed to the event and the ongoing support of Delphi Bank.

*Call Me Emilios* is available for \$30 from the Hellenic Museum, Caras, the Law Institute Bookshop, Readings, the Immigration Museum and the Coop Bookshop as well as from the Food for Thought Network by emailing [membership@fftn.org.au](mailto:membership@fftn.org.au)

