

## Chapter 13

# **PROXENIA, WEDDINGS AND FAMILIES**

**A**fter 1920, there was a large escalation of Greek migration to Queensland. There were a number of reasons for this. The ten years of wars from 1912 to 1922 led many in Greece to seek a more peaceful abode in the antipodes. The economic distress caused by those wars provided a further incentive to migrate. The chain migration, commenced in the early years of the century, now gathered momentum. Husbands who had intended to return to their families in Greece after accumulating assets, decided to stay and bring their families out. Many unmarried men decided to get married and travelled to Greece to marry and return with their new wife. In the process, there began a shift from a Greek community dominated by single males towards one dominated by the family.

By this time, there was a significant change of attitude on the part of the early migrants in the matter of returning to Greece. They were enjoying comparative economic prosperity and did not relish the thought of going back to live in a homeland beset with chronic poverty. They feared the prospect of further wars and the conscription that would accompany them. By now, they had settled down in the new land and were beginning to feel at home in it. Above all, they were coming to the conclusion that Australia, with its peace and prosperity, was a better country in which to raise a family than Greece.

Having decided to get married, many of the men went back to Greece to find a wife. Others chose a wife by correspondence and arranged for her to come to Australia. Some found a partner among the increasing number of single Greek women who were now beginning to arrive in Queensland.

The usual method of arranging for two people to become engaged was by *proxenia*. A man who had decided to get married would inform a relative or friend (the *proxeniti*) of his decision and depute him as his agent to find him a wife. The latter would choose, from among the Greek girls whom he knew, one who, he thought, was suitable for the prospective groom. If the latter was agreeable, the *proxeniti* would then contact the father or other male relative of the girl and arrange for the man and the girl to meet in a group with others. If the two were drawn to each other and were agreeable to marriage, an engagement would be arranged. After the engagement, the couple could go out together but always with a chaperone.

A man choosing a wife from overseas by correspondence would usually write to a *proxeniti* in his home village and ask him to find a girl from the village. The *proxeniti* would choose a girl and write to the man suggesting her name, sometimes, but not always, enclosing a photo. If the man was agreeable, the *proxeniti* would then approach the father or other male relative of the girl and enquire as to whether she was interested in marrying the man. If the girl did not know the man, because he had left the village many years before, she would be shown a photo of him. If the girl and her family were agreeable to an engagement, the *proxeniti* would write to the man, informing him of the results of the approach, and enclosing a photo, if one had not been sent before. If the man, on receipt of the letter, was agreeable to an engagement, he would inform the *proxeniti* and send the amount of the fare for the girl to travel to Australia to marry him.

Looked at from our modern perspective, marriage by *proxenia* might be seen to be a somewhat hazardous method of choosing a partner. There was usually no opportunity for the couple to talk to each other alone before they were betrothed. They often had to make the decision to marry after only a brief meeting with the other in the company of others. Much depended on the judgment of the *proxeniti*. And yet, the impression gained by the writer was that in the great majority of cases, the marriages turned out to be strong and happy ones. The judgment of the *proxeniti*, the girl's family and the couple themselves, appears to have been generally a wise one.

Marriage by *proxenia* left little room for romance. Many of the migrants admitted to the writer that it was only after the marriage that they began to love their partner. At the date of the marriage there was often little more than respect for the character of the other, and a warming to the other which needed the intimacy of marriage to develop into full-blown marital love. But, as we shall see later, there were exceptions when romance came first and marriage later.

One of those who decided to go back to his home village to find a wife was the writer's father, Arthur Conomos. He had come to Australia in 1912 at the age of 16, and had worked for the Freeleguses in Brisbane, cut cane at Childers, and operated cafes in Boonah and Brisbane, before buying into a partnership which owned cafes in Toowoomba and Dalby. In 1929, he left Dalby to return to Kythera to find a wife. When he arrived at his home village of Kapsali, he met Elenie (Helen) Emmanuel Varipatis, who had been only two years old when he had left to come to Australia. She was now a grown woman of 19 years. The families were *koumbaroi*, as Conomos' sister Dindi was the godmother of two of Helen's siblings and they were near neighbours. Conomos and Helen saw each other frequently in the normal course of village life. After three or four months of such contact, Conomos, accompanied by a *proxeniti*, asked Emmanuel Varipatis for permission to marry his daughter. That permission was granted, and Helen herself agreeing, the couple became engaged, marrying five months later. During the engagement period, the couple saw each other constantly but always in the company of a brother or sister acting as chaperone. Eighteen days after they were married, they set off for Australia.

When Peter Aroney left Australia in 1912 to go to Greece, it is not known whether he had marriage in mind. His main purpose in going, as we have seen, was to fight in the First Balkan War. After that war was over, he was required to continue serving in the army and was not discharged until October 1919. On returning to civilian life, he decided that it was time for him to find a wife. Living in Athens at the time was a young woman called Irene Mavromatis, from the village of Pitsinades in Kythera. Her father, Mihali Mavromatis, was an architect and builder who divided his time between Kythera and Athens. At the time of Aroney's discharge from the army, Mavromatis and Irene were staying in Athens with a married sister of Irene's. Aroney and Irene knew each other because their villages were close and they had struck up a friendship in Kythera. When a friend of Aroney's said that he wanted to crown him (in marriage), he realised that the time had come for him to be married. He decided to visit Irene's father and ask him for permission to marry his daughter.

Aroney and his friend set off to visit Mihali Mavromatis. On the way, they met another friend who also went with them. When they arrived, everyone began to talk and Aroney was unable to take Irene's father aside to discuss the purpose for which he had gone. Concluding that the time was not opportune, Aroney took his friends and left. When they had gone a little way, Aroney told the others to walk on and he returned to the house. He

told Mavromatis that he had come to ask for his daughter's hand. 'On whose behalf?' Mavromatis asked. 'Mine', replied Aroney. Mavromatis, recalls Aroney, almost fell down with surprise. However, he spoke to Irene who agreed to accept the proposal, and the father added his own consent. Soon afterwards, they were married, and after staying in Kythera for a month, they set off for Australia.

A woman who came to Australia to enter into a marriage arranged by correspondence had a particularly difficult decision to make. To leave her family in Greece and come to Australia to marry a man she did not know was a formidable step for a young woman to take. Many took that step because it was the only way that they could make a good match. In Greece, a woman's family had to provide the prospective groom with *prika* (dowry). The more eligible the prospective groom, the higher the dowry. The dowry could be paid in cash or in livestock. The custom posed serious problems for women whose families were chronically poor. It was adverse, too, for women who were not as well endowed with looks as others in the village. In their case, a larger dowry would be needed to attract an eligible groom.

All these dowry problems vanished if the woman was prepared to come to marry in Australia. The men in Australia did not require a dowry to be paid. They were economically in a much stronger position than the bride's family, and could not bring themselves to ask that family to give them a gift from their meagre assets. In any event, any gift that the bride's family might have given would have been hardly noticed by men who were earning many times what the bride's father was earning. Furthermore, the men were so overjoyed to find a Greek woman to share their life, that the idea of a dowry held no attraction for them. The result was that women who may have remained unmarried back home, or entered an unsatisfactory match, were prepared to suffer all the trauma of separation from their family to come to Australia to marry a man they had been assured was of good character and in a sound financial position.

Thus it was that when Penelope Cocolas was approached by a relative and told that Adoni Karistinos (Tony Caris), a young Greek cafe owner in Roma, was prepared to marry her, she agreed to come. Her family had fled from Tsesme in Asia Minor in the Catastrophe and had gone to live on Chios. There they lived a life of poverty. There was no money for the dowry, but a relative who had been corresponding with Caris told Penelope's father that Caris did not require a dowry. Penelope was told that he was a man of good character and, like her, a native of Tsesme. She was further told that he intended to return to live in Greece in three to five years. Contemplating

her unfavourable circumstances in Greece, Penelope accepted the offer of marriage and came to Australia in 1930. The marriage turned out to be a very successful one, but the stay in Australia was longer than the anticipated three to five years. When the writer interviewed Penelope, she had been in Australia for over fifty years!

Another who came out to enter into a marriage in similar circumstances was Triantafilia (Rosie) Loukas. In 1934, it was agreed by correspondence that Rosie leave Castellorizo and come to Australia to marry Jack Barboutis who at the time was managing the Innisfail Hotel at Townsville. She was accompanied to Australia by her father Vasilios who stayed in Townsville for 40 days and then returned to Castellorizo. A month after Rosie's arrival, she and Barboutis were married.

For some women, the awesome decision that had to be made about whether to agree to leave home and go to Australia to marry a man they did not know was one that caused them intense agony. The mental struggle was made worse if there was pressure from her family to accept. In the latter case, she sometimes had to choose between following her own feelings or the wishes of her family.

One for whom *proxenia* brought that mental struggle was Elenie Levounis of Potamo, Kythera. In 1922, when she was only 19 years old, and had been working in Athens for four years as a dressmaker, she was told by an uncle, Manolis Koocoolos, that Vince Hellen (Valerios Veneris), a farmer working in partnership with his brother Nicholas in Many Peaks, in central Queensland, had written to him asking him to find a wife for him '*as fora ke to mantili*'. In other words, he would be happy to have her even if she were a simple village girl wearing a scarf over her head. Hellen was well known to Koocoolos as he had worked for him for about five years in his confectionery factory in New York, USA.

Koocoolos quickly decided that his niece would make a good wife for Hellen and proceeded to play the part of *proxeniti*. He went first of all to see Elenie's mother, Metaxia, in Potamo (Elenie's father had died when she was only eight years old) and discussed the matter with her. He then went to Athens and took Elenie back with him to Potamo. Koocoolos read Hellen's letter to Metaxia, and asked her what she thought. 'Don't ask me', she replied, 'ask her', (pointing to Elenie who was standing nearby).

Koocoolos went up to Elenie and said to her, 'I want to talk to you. Would you like to make a big trip?'

'What sort of trip?' asked Elenie. 'I've just been on one.'

‘To Australia’, replied Koocholes.

‘Australia? What for? I haven’t heard from my brother, Mina. I don’t know anyone else there.’

‘I know someone who will suit you very well as a husband’, replied Koocholes. He read out Hellen’s letter and described him to her. He urged her to go and marry him.

Elenie was overcome with surprise. ‘It’s not time yet for me to get married’, she said.

‘Think about it’, replied Koocholes. ‘You’ll never find a man like that in your whole life.’

‘Why don’t you send Koula?’, (Elenie’s sister, who had been brought up by Koocholes and his wife).

‘He suits you.’

‘How old is he?’

‘Thirty to thirty-one.’

‘Uncle, I don’t want to marry. Let me go to Athens and finish my training and then I’ll see.’

He said, ‘It’ll be too late. Such a decision has to be made within a fortnight’.

Elenie replied, ‘Forget it’, and walked out.

Koocholes became angry. ‘She doesn’t want to even hear mention of marriage’, he said to Metaxia.

‘Don’t blame her. I don’t want her to go either. Go and find someone else’, she said.

‘What’s the matter with you, Metaxia? Such a lovely man. You have so many children [there were seven] and you find an opportunity like this. You should thank God for it. I know Valerio. I had him under me. If this doesn’t go through, this will be the last time I will come into this house.’

Koocholes then showed Elenie a photo of Vince. ‘He’s a wonderful person, Elenie. You should thank God that you have an opportunity to help your other sisters. You have no father and I won’t live much longer.’ Elenie was in a terrible dilemma. Her uncle had been like a father to her, and he was pleading for her to accept Hellen. Her mother Metaxia was crying.

‘I will think about it. I don’t know *ti kapno foumari*? (literally: ‘I don’t know what tobacco he smokes’, meaning: ‘I don’t know much about him’).

Koocooles replied, 'I know. I give you my word, you won't regret it. He's the right man for you. I know him and I know you.' Elenie started to cry. Her mother said to her, 'My child, I leave it to you. If you want to go, go.' But still Elenie refused.

A little later, another uncle, Strati, and Elenie's grandparents came to talk to her. They reminded her how hard her mother was struggling to support the family. It was a great opportunity, they told her. She should be grateful to God and go. Elenie walked up and down. She and her sisters were crying. None of them wanted her to go. Then, Koocooles and his wife, who had gone to the *agora*, returned. Koocooles wanted to know what had been decided. 'Uncle', said Elenie, 'you've given me a day to decide whether to go to Australia. Tell me what I am to do - to please you or to please my mother?'

'Your mother. She will see good days from you. Instead of working in the fields, she will be able to stay in her home and rest.' At last, Elenie, for her mother's sake, agreed to go to Australia and marry Hellen. After three weeks, in an atmosphere of great sadness, she left. With her on the voyage were Gregoria Veneris (her future sister-in-law) and her two children, who were going to join Gregoria's husband, (and Vince's brother), Manoli.

After staying for three days in Sydney, Elenie and her companions were put on a train for Brisbane. As the train arrived at the South Brisbane station, Elenie saw three men walking up and down. She realised that one of them was Manoli Veneris, whose photo she had seen back home. The train stopped, and Elenie poked her head out of the window. The three men came up to her. One of them was her brother Minas (Mick Levonis), whom she hadn't seen for ten years. She didn't recognise him but he eventually recognised her and yelled out, 'Here is my sister'. He began to cry. 'I left a child and now I see a grown up woman', he said excitedly. Elenie alighted from the train and she and Mina embraced. Mina then said, 'I will introduce you to your fiancee'. Up to this point, there had been no communication between Elenie and Vince, not even by letter. Vince handed her a bouquet of gladioli and said, 'Your future husband'. They looked at each other in silence.

The arrangements for the wedding had already been made. Mick and others asked Elenie if she still wanted to proceed with the marriage. Mick mentioned someone else who was prepared to marry her. She replied, 'If I said to my mother I would marry this man, this is the man I will marry'. Six days after arriving in Brisbane, Elenie was married and the couple went

on a three months' honeymoon. Elenie soon realised that her uncle's judgment had been correct. 'I took to him straight away and he took to me. It must have been from God.'

A similar inner struggle had to be endured by Antigone Andronicos (née Karidis). Antigone's father, Panagioti, had returned to Milopotamo, in Kythera, from Australia, bringing with him a large sum of money which he had earned as a cafe worker in Toowoomba. His brother, Manoli, put before him what seemed a promising scheme to start a tile factory in Greece and asked him to lend him the capital required. Panagioti agreed and handed over most of the money he had brought from Australia. Not long afterwards came the Catastrophe and Manoli lost everything. Panagioti was now left a poor man.

One of the more serious consequences of this poverty was that Panagioti was unable to give dowries for his four daughters to be married. When, therefore, Harry Andronicos, a successful cafe owner from Toowoomba, who had returned to Kythera in 1928, asked Panagioti for permission to marry Antigone, it seemed to everyone that here was a golden opportunity to overcome the dowry problem. Not only would Antigone find a relatively wealthy husband, but through her marriage, the way would be opened up for her other sisters to find husbands as well. Thus, Antigone, both for her own sake and for her sisters' sake, agreed to marry a man she hardly knew and who would take her far away from home.

When the girl being sought by the male suitor was in Australia, *proxenia* was, of course, much easier. In such a case, the man and the woman were at least able to meet, albeit with others present, to size each other up. Sometimes, the meeting was pre-arranged as part of the *proxenia* process. On such occasions, the couple would be aware of the purpose of the meeting. There were, however, other occasions when the couple would meet in less obvious circumstances but for the same ultimate purpose.

When in about 1930, Theodore Constantinos Comino, farmer and fruiterer of Gympie, decided it was time for him to get married, he wrote home to his parents in Kythera, to inform them of his decision, naming a certain woman for their opinion. His parents wrote back advising against his marrying the woman he had named, but suggesting instead that he consider one of the daughters of Panagiotis Ioannou Cominos, a neighbour in the village of Perligianika. The daughters - Matina, Elenie and Vasiliki - were at that time living with their brothers in Rockhampton. Theo decided to pay the Comino family in Rockhampton a visit but he did not disclose the true purpose of the visit. Instead, he told them that he was in Rockhampton on business and stayed at a hotel.



The Comino brothers, perhaps sensing that here was a possible suitor for one of their sisters, arranged a party in honour of their fellow villager. In the course of the evening, Theo and Matina conversed. The next day, Theo left Rockhampton without the subject of marriage being broached. A short time afterwards, however, he wrote to Matina's brothers asking for permission to marry Matina. Con Castrisos, a cousin of Theo's, who was at that time working at Gympie, acted as *proxeniti*. The brothers, after consulting with Matina, gave their permission, and in 1931, the couple were married.

The process of *proxenia* did not always run smoothly. Sometimes, the approach by the *proxeniti* was met by a negative response from the girl. On such occasions, the *proxeniti* and the male suitor had to decide whether to persevere or to turn their attention to another girl. When Charlie Freeleagus and Harry Coronos decided to try to match Freeleagus' niece, Vasilia Castrissios, who was living with her uncles in Brisbane, with Coronos' nephew, Jim Coronos, of Quilpie, it would have appeared to them that the task would not be difficult. Vasilia had come to Australia with Jim's sister; the families were very close, being from the same village of Frilingianika, in Kythera; and Charlie Freeleagus and Jim Coronos had gone to school together, sharing the same lodgings in Potamo when they attended the intermediate school.

The two intermediaries, however, met with an early setback. As Vasilia put it many years later, Jim was taking a lot of persuading to go and meet her. 'When I heard this, I got my back up', she admits, 'and without having seen him, I said that I didn't want him'. However, the meeting did eventually take place, but neither took to each other and nothing came of it. Not long afterwards, Jim Coronos went to Brisbane to attend the baptism of Christy Freeleagus' son, Alec, for whom he was to act as godfather. At the baptism, he met Vasilia again. This time, the meeting was a much warmer one. The two took to each other and agreed to marry.

There were times when *proxenia* would happen with amazing speed to take advantage of a favourable situation which had suddenly materialised. In 1925, the Castellorizan, Elenie Souvlis, set out from Sydney with her parents to join her brothers in north Queensland. When they reached Brisbane, the boat that was taking them to the north was held up by a strike and they were forced to remain in Brisbane until the strike was settled. A friend of Elenie's brothers, Barney Katahanas, invited them to stay with him. Within a day or two, *proxenia* was carried out, and when Elenie left for the north, six days after arriving in Brisbane, she and Katahanas were engaged.

The manner in which *proxenia* operated meant that romance seldom preceded the decision to marry. Generally, the couple would not have met alone. If one had romantic feelings towards the other, there would be no opportunity to reveal those feelings to the other in a private meeting. Nevertheless, against all the odds, young Greek men and women occasionally managed to fall in love before becoming engaged.

In 1923, two Ionian refugee families - the Nicolaides and the Kambaklis families - found themselves living opposite one another in Irakleion, Crete. Soon, a romance developed between Anthony Nicolaides and Stella Kambaklis.

‘It was Tony who started it off’, recalls Stella. ‘Then I gave him some *vasiliko* [basil herb]. Another girl acted as a go-between. Sometimes, Tony would throw a stone with a note wrapped around it into our yard. My family thought that I was too young. I was still only a teenager. They told Tony to go to Australia and when I was older, to send for me. Eventually, however, we persuaded them to let us marry.’

In July 1932, Milton Samios, who had been holidaying in Greece for two years, was preparing to return to his cafe business in Brisbane when he fell in love with a young woman in Kythera. Constantina, his future wife, had just obtained her diploma in music in Athens. Accompanied by her uncle and sister, she left Athens to holiday at her grandfather’s home in Alousianika, in Kythera - the village where Milton was packing up to leave for Australia. ‘I saw a nice young man’, Constantina recalls, ‘and it was love at first sight. We got to know each other and danced together. Soon we were engaged. We didn’t need a *proxeniti*.’ Within a month, the couple were married in Athens and a month later, they were on their way to Australia.

Despite all the barriers put up against romantic love, determined lovers could still find a way through. When Stratis Christofis left Ismalia in Egypt to come to Australia in 1916, Evangelia Mouzouris, daughter of Elias and Ioulia Mouzouris, was only three years old. In 1930, when he returned for a holiday, she was a young woman of 17 years. The two families knew each other well. A sister of Stratis had married a brother of Elias. For three months, Stratis stayed with the Mouzouris family, and a romance soon developed between him and Evangelia. Stratis then left to go and visit relatives on his home island of Cyprus. When he returned to Ismalia, he asked Evangelia to marry him and go to Australia with him. Evangelia was willing to do so, but her father would not agree. Stratis returned to his cafe business in Brisbane, and carried on a correspondence with Evangelia. In 1932, he sent

Evangelia an engagement ring and the two became privately engaged. But still Elias refused to give his permission for the marriage.

One day, Evangelia and her family were sitting at the table discussing the engagement. 'They were telling me all sorts of things', recalls Evangelia. 'I asked one of them, "How many years were you waiting for your wife?". "Seven years". "And you, uncle?" "Seven years". "And you?" I asked another. "Three years". "And you, father?" "Twelve". He had loved his wife, my stepmother, as a girl but didn't do anything and lost her. Later, when my mother died at my birth, he married her.' Evangelia had made her point.

' "All right", my father said, "I will write to Stratis to come and marry you". My father didn't like it but he couldn't stop it. He knew that in our family, men and women loved once in a lifetime and never again. Stratis came in 1933 and we got married.'

In the village of Vorliotis on the island of Samos, two other young lovers were meeting parental opposition to their marriage. Patra Agnaotopoulos and Emmanuel Nicholas Trovas, however, were determined that their love would not be thwarted. In a move which was daring for those days, they left Samos together, came to Australia and were married here.

In 1938, in the small coastal resort of Tin Can Bay near Gympie, a man and a woman were thrown together by flood rains and given the kind of private time together which eluded most of the other young Greek men and women of their time. Maria Perichis, a native of Castellorizo, had left Queanbeyan in New South Wales with a cousin to travel to Ingham. On the way, they stopped at Gympie to stay with the cousin's father-in-law, Kosta (Con) Pantelakis. Pantelakis was a friend of the Patrick brothers (Mick, Steve and Con) and would go fishing with them. Mick Patrick had recently built a cottage at Tin Can Bay, and he invited Pantelakis and his visitors to have a week's holiday there. He travelled to the beach with them, intending to help them settle in and then return to Gympie.

Soon after they arrived at Tin Can Bay, the rain set in and local flooding cut off the road to Gympie. Mick Patrick, unable to return, stayed on. This was to have a crucial influence on the lives of Maria and Mick. For a week, they shared the same house and had many opportunities to talk privately with each other. They found that they had much in common. Maria, who had lived for some years with her family in Russia, as was mentioned in an earlier chapter, learned that at one time Mick had wanted to marry a Russian girl but when his mother refused to sanction such a marriage, he gave up the idea and decided that he would never marry.

When the time came for Maria's cousin to return to Ingham taking Maria with her, it was suggested that Maria, who had by now been drawn to Mick, stay in Gympie to get better acquainted with him. Maria agreed and in the course of the next few weeks, she and Mick saw much of each other, even going for walks together without a chaperone - something that was unusual for the Greeks of those days. Their friendship grew, and within 30 days of their meeting, Mick proposed and Maria accepted. They were married in June 1938, to the astonishment, says Maria, of the Gympie people, who had come to regard Mick as a confirmed bachelor.

As in all societies where the custom is for the male to initiate a romantic relationship, Greek girls usually had to keep any romantic feelings they might have to themselves, without disclosing them to the one who was the object of those feelings. Such was the case with Stella Galanis, who developed romantic feelings towards a man she had never met. When she worked for her brother, Stan Garland, in his cafe in Maryborough, she took fish orders on the phone from the many Greek cafes they were supplying and then made out accounts. In 1914, she took a fish order from George Marcellos who was working in a cafe in Ipswich. After that, they spoke to each other often on the phone. Stella became drawn to him and began to refer to him as 'my honey' when talking to her brothers and cousin. One day, her cousin Jim Aroney, as a practical joke, wrote 'Honey' above the name of 'George Marcellos' in a label on a consignment of fish. When the consignment arrived in Ipswich, Marcellos was puzzled as to why someone had sent him a carton of honey.

In 1917, Stella met Marcellos in person for the first time at a Greek National Day party in Brisbane. Though the meeting between the two was a pleasant one, nothing developed from it. Some time afterwards, Marcellos left Ipswich and made preparations for a visit to Greece. While he was in Brisbane attending to his preparations, he met Chrisanthi Freeleagus, whose husband George was an uncle of Stella's. She asked him why he was going to Greece, to which he replied that he was going to find a wife. She expressed surprise that he should be going all the way to Greece to find a wife, when there were suitable girls in Australia. When he enquired as to who they might be, she mentioned Stella's name, informing Marcellos that she was a niece of her husband's and extolling her virtues.

Not long afterwards, Marcellos, accompanied by Anthony Aroney (Koumesos), went to Maryborough to see the Garlands. Stella knew Aroney well, having played as his daughter in a Greek play. Ever afterwards, she addressed him as 'Daddy' whenever they met. When they were all gathered

together, Stella began to play the piano. Suddenly, Marcellos put his hand on the piano and said, 'One moment. We have something to discuss and then you can play. "Daddy" here [pointing to Aroney] and your brother Strati think that we can live together but I want to know what you think.' Stella remained silent. 'Do you accept?' asked Marcellos. 'Certainly', Stella replied. Such was the formality with which a relationship, which by now had generated warm feelings of affection, was cemented. The two became engaged and were married in 1921.

The absence of a priest in Brisbane until 1923 sometimes caused problems when there was a marriage to be conducted. The Sydney priest, Fr Marinakis, was not always available when his services were required. Adonios Georgiou Pantelakis (Tony Pantlus) found himself in such a predicament when he wanted to be married in 1923 (before the arrival of Fr Maravelis) to Elenie Marinakis, sister of Fr Marinakis. He solved the problem by getting married in a civil ceremony, but this created another problem. 'My wife wouldn't sleep with me until her brother came and married us', he recalls. When the church ceremony eventually took place, Pantlus was so overjoyed that he decided to make it a community affair. 'I put up a notice in the Club inviting everyone to the wedding.'

Such was the degree of patriarchal control of the girls' lives in those days, that sometimes the girls were not even consulted before a marriage was arranged. Anastasia Gavrilis of Logothetianika, in Kythera, lost her father when she was seven and was brought up by her mother with financial help from her father's brother, who had a milk bar in Durban, South Africa. In 1921, Jim Freeleagus passed through Durban on his way to Johannesburg where he was to pick up his recently widowed sister, Maria Castrissios, to take her and her children back to Kythera. In Durban, he met Anastasia's uncle who was also going to Kythera.

Shortly afterwards, Anastasia's uncle and Jim Freeleagus met in Potamo, in Kythera. The uncle invited Freeleagus to visit him in the nearby village of Logothetianika. During that visit, Freeleagus met Anastasia, and was immediately drawn to her. Within a few days, he asked Anastasia's uncle and mother for permission to marry her. Without consulting with Anastasia to ascertain her wishes, they gave their acceptance. A day or so later, Anastasia overheard her mother and uncle talking, and learnt to her complete surprise that she had been promised to Freeleagus. But the discovery did not trouble her. As Freeleagus had been drawn to her, so she had been drawn to him. Within a week of the *proxenia* being concluded, the wedding took place, and a week after the wedding, they set off for Australia. 'My granddaughters

ask me how it is that my family sent me so far away', she says. 'I tell them that it was because my family knew my husband's family and knew that he was a good man.'

Marriages arranged without the agreement of the girl did not always turn out as happily as that of Anastasia and Jim Freeleagus. A certain teenage girl in Queensland was told by her father that she had to marry a particular man. She protested, saying that she did not like him. Her father insisted that the marriage proceed, and the resulting union was an unhappy one. Fortunately, such unwise use of *proxenia* appears to have been comparatively rare.

The greater availability of eligible Greek women did not eliminate mixed marriages. The practical difficulties of carrying out *proxenia* with a girl in Greece, the shortage of eligible Greek women in Australia and the timeless ability of romance to break through ethnic barriers, meant that Greek men continued to marry non-Greek women. In doing so, they usually had to confront prejudice from both the Greek and Australian communities and opposition from churches in both.

We catch a glimpse of the difficulties encountered by couples desiring to cross the ethnic divide in the experiences of the Ithakitian Gerasimos (Gerry) Palmos and his wife Elizabeth (née McNeil). Palmos arrived in Australia in 1923, after spending some time in the Greek navy. In the early 1930s, he joined the crew of the *Canberra* which was based in Sydney and plied between Melbourne and Cairns. When in Brisbane, the ship would sail past Lourdes Hill College at Hawthorne, creating great excitement among the girls and their teachers at the school. The ship's crew would be greeted by a triple dipping of the school flag, to which the ship would reply in similar fashion. Among the girls was Elizabeth McNeil, daughter of a Scottish migrant. She could not have imagined that one day she would marry a member of the crew. The path to marriage, however, was to be a rocky one.

After completing her schooling, Elizabeth found work as an office-girl at the Pantheon Cafe owned by Peter Black in Queen Street. There she became acquainted with Spiro Defteros, the pastry-cook in the bakery attached to the shop. Defteros had a Greek friend who would come to visit him when his ship was in Brisbane - Gerry Palmos. Palmos became interested in Elizabeth but she discouraged any romance.

'I had never had anything to do with foreign people and at first I would have nothing to do with him', she admits. 'I had been brought up in a narrow environment, attending Catholic schools and being taught by nuns.'

Gradually, Palmos began to break down the barrier. He would wait for Elizabeth to finish work and walk along the street with her. Then he began to ring her up at work. One night, he invited her to have a cup of tea with him at the Kewpie Cafe in Edward Street. As they were having their tea and sandwiches, Palmos placed a ring on the table. It was an engagement ring. Elizabeth thought that Palmos was rushing things and told him to pick up the ring; she didn't want it. Palmos refused and got up to leave. 'He knew my Scottish instinct wouldn't allow me to leave the ring there', says Elizabeth. 'I picked it up and took it home with me.' Later in the week, Elizabeth's sister was searching for something in Elizabeth's handbag and came across the ring. The secret was out. Elizabeth's father told her gently that although he didn't dislike Palmos, there were too many difficulties in the way if they were married. Palmos was not Catholic. If she married him, she would have to change her life style. She could be asked to learn another language or go to live in another country. She replied that she could cope with the problems and so he agreed to the marriage. Her mother, who liked Palmos from the beginning, also agreed.

There were still barriers to be overcome. Palmos's parents objected to the marriage. His Greek friends told him he would be making a great mistake in marrying an Australian. One of the nuns told Elizabeth that although Gerry came from a cultured race, he was not a Catholic, and advised against the marriage. Palmos was told by a family member that if he married Elizabeth, he would always be poor and he'd never see his family or homeland again. 'Everyone was against our marrying. Gerry suggested we break it off and I agreed.' Gerry packed his bags and set off for Sydney. When the train got to Newcastle, he rang Elizabeth, and told her that it was ridiculous. He wasn't going to listen to anybody. He was going to come back the next week. When he returned, they agreed to proceed with the marriage. They now had difficulty in finding a church that would marry them. The Greek Church refused to marry them because Elizabeth was a Catholic. The Catholic Church refused to marry them because Gerry would not promise to allow his children to be brought up in the Catholic faith. Finally, Elizabeth was baptised into the Greek Church and they were married by a Greek priest.

Not all the Greek men who married an Australian met the same obstacles, but most met prejudice. Bill Venardos, who married Mavis Herman, the police sergeant's daughter at Jericho, claims that his marriage was '...against the wishes of the Greeks. They were very much against me. Only after I became President of the Kytherians and ran around the government offices for them did they accept me. Before that I was on the outer. It was unspoken

but you could feel it. My wife suffered too.’ Mervyn Archos claims that his father, whose wife Queenie was Lebanese, was often given the impression, ‘You’re not one of us’.

Some Greek men who entered into a mixed marriage did not meet with prejudice. Violet Syrmis (wife of George D. Syrmis), Peter and Beatrice Morton, and Mary Aroney (wife of Harry Aroney) all testified that they and their spouses did not encounter prejudice from either the Greeks or the Australians.

It says something for the strength of character of many of the young men and women who entered into mixed marriages, that they were able to overcome the obstacles that confronted them and go on to create happy and enduring marriages. They were marrying at a time when there was still little fraternisation between Greeks and non-Greeks. They had to contend with the marked differences between Greek and Anglo-Celtic cultures. And as in the case of Charles and Gladys Strategos, they had to cement their relationship without the benefit of parental counsel.

Gladys Bubbers was born in London in 1892, and migrated to Australia in about 1912 with her sister. She went to Gympie, and for a time looked after an elderly couple. We saw earlier that Strategos at the time owned a cafe and a small-goods shop and that Gladys was a customer at the latter shop. The two young people got to know each other, and Strategos asked to take Gladys out. ‘The old lady I was working for at the time wouldn’t let me go out with him until she found out he was “straight”,’ recalls Gladys. The couple went together for two years, mainly to the pictures. Soon after they started going together, Strategos, as mentioned earlier, put Gladys in charge of the small-goods shop, and she ran it with the help of another girl. They were married in 1915.

For some Greek men, a mixed marriage resulted in withdrawal from the Greek Community and the virtual abandonment of their Greek way of life. When George T. Mavromatis married Ellen, an Australian, in 1926, he drifted away from the Greek Community. He stopped going to the Club (his wife didn’t like the gambling there) and had little contact with the Greeks. There was little observance of Greek customs by his family; they didn’t have Greek meals in the home; the children were not taught Greek; and although they were baptised in the Greek Church, they were brought up as Anglicans. A daughter says that she and her siblings were brought up as Australians. They didn’t feel very different from other Australian children. Mervyn Archos says that his father didn’t mix much with the other Greeks



of Innisfail, although he had a few close friends among them. He and his two siblings never learned Greek. 'The only Greek feature of our home life was its conservatism. Dad was strict and made it clear that he was in charge.'

Other Greek men who entered a mixed marriage retained their Greek links. They would visit the Greek coffee houses, attend Greek social functions, worship in the Greek Church and participate in the life of the Greek Community, as any other Greek men did. This was the case with Harry Aroney, who, after marrying Mary, an Australian, continued to be fully involved in the life of the Greek Community in Brisbane, becoming especially active in the Kytherian Association. Mary does not recall any prejudice suffered by Harry or herself as a result of their mixed marriage. She immersed herself alongside her husband in the life of the Greek Community. Aroney was fond of socialising and played his guitar at many weddings, baptisms and other social gatherings. Wherever he went, Mary went with him. 'I was mainly mixing with Greek people', recalls Mary. 'We had Greek people visiting us often.' But Mary did not completely abandon her Australian links. One link that she retained was with her Methodist Church. The couple were married by a Methodist minister in 1922, and Mary continued to attend the Methodist Church throughout her married life. Harry would take her to the Albert Street Methodist Church every Sunday night and later go to pick her up after the service.

When Greek men married Catholic wives, their wives and children usually retained their association with the Catholic Church. Peter John Strategos' wife, Ada, was a Catholic, and the children were brought up as Catholics, attending Catholic Schools. Peter, who was in business for many years in Rockhampton, had a small number of Greek friends, but otherwise mixed almost entirely with Australians. George D. Syrmi's wife, Violet (née Azar) was Lebanese and Catholic. They were married in the Lebanese Catholic Church in Ernest Street, South Brisbane. Violet continued to attend the Catholic Church regularly throughout her marriage. However, she decided to learn Greek and attended a Greek class run by Mrs Fatseas for a few years. As a result, she learned to write Greek and would write in Greek to her Greek relatives.

As the 1920s proceeded to their close, the era of a mainly male single Greek Community was coming to an end and a new era of family-oriented communities was beginning. This was to have a large impact on the future direction of the communities. From now on, they were to concentrate on family oriented gatherings, Greek schools, school concerts, and a greater access to Greek Orthodox services. This change of direction, reinforced by

the wholesale abandonment of a return to the homeland, was to bring new vigour to the Brisbane Community and spawn a number of new communities in the larger country towns. Meanwhile, those arranging marriages by *proxenia* were to be kept increasingly busy.



*Double wedding of Harry Londy and Mick Levonis at Ipswich in 1926*

*Harry Londy married Theodora Marendis*

*Mick Levonis married Kaliope Leondarakis (Londy)*

*Front row: Cherie Strategos, Charles Londy, Harry Londy, Theodora Londy, Kaliope Levonis, Mick Levonis, Jack Levonis, Stella J. Londy. Boy in front of Jack Levonis Unknown*

*Second row: Jim Londy, Irene Londy, Unknown, Unknown, Unknown, Charles Strategos, Eleni V. Hellen*

*Third row: George Masselos, Arthur Conomos, Unknown, Mick Londy (Townsville), Unknown, Unknown*

*Back row: Elizabeth Conomos, Harry Andronicos, Gladys C. Strategos, Andrew Strategos*



*Wedding of Andrew Tambakis and Irene Poteri at Toowoomba in 1940*

*Front row: L. to r.: Beatie Psaros, Jim T. Poteri, Ursula Poteri, Andrew Tambakis (groom), Irene Tambakis (bride), Kirani Vlahogeni (bridesmaid), Aspasia T. Poteri (bridesmaid), Antigone Poteri, holding baby Aspasia Poteri*

*Flower girls in front: Becca Comino, Marietta Andronicos*

*Middle row: Peter Patty, Cecil Prineas, Maude Poteri, Theo Poteri, George Mariolas, Harry Poteri, Maria Sklavos, George Sklavos*

*Back row: Paul Patty, Manuel Poteri, Theo Tsimeris, Jim Tambakis, Peter Poteri, Nicholas Poteri, Violet Strategos, Jim Strategos*



*Wedding of Paul S. Comino and Rodanthy (Rose) Galanis at Maryborough on 18 June, 1924  
 Front row, l. to r.: Ethel T. Comino, Aphrodite Marcellos, Paul S. Comino, Rose P. Comino, Stratis Galanis (Stan Garland), Unknown  
 Back row, l. to r.: Child unknown, Theo S. Comino, Manolis Galanis (Manuel Garland), Unknown in rear, Jim Menegas, Stella Marcellos, Child unknown, John S. Comino, Stamatina J. Comino, Andrew Blavery, Unknown, Peter Spathis, Korina Spathis (in front of Peter Spathis), Children in front unknown*



*Nicholas and Marianthi Syrmis at Townsville in about 1930*



*A Greek wedding at Biloela on 4 November, 1937. Groom, Chris Arnas, Bride, Zaharoula Loula. The lady with the baby is Anna Comino, wife of Angelo Comino from Rockhampton. On her left is Stelio Cocaris and the second on his left is John Cocaris.*



*Triple Taifalos wedding at Silkwood, North Queensland, on 29 April, 1925. Bridal couples, left to right: Michael and Chrissi Taifalos, Thomas and Christine Eustace (Efsthathiou) and John and Flora Taifalos. (Christine Eustace was a sister of Michael and John.)*

*Others: Pantelis and Theofania Taifalos (parents of Michael and John Taifalos and Christine Eustace), John Chrissos, Evangelia Chrissos (sister of Michael, John and Christine), Savas Taifalos (brother) and his wife Molly, Spiro Taifalos (brother), Jim Passaris, Nicholas and Sevesta Tsakissiris, Arthur Tsakissiris, Peggy Sakalis, Chrissi Haratsis, John Katahanas, Mrs Katmadas, Wally Boustead, Bill Boustead, Annie Boustead, Mrs Howarth, Mrs Edgerton, Mrs Wheatall, George and Ann Tsakissiris, John and Anastasia Skleros, Mrs Ellis and the McQuillan and Mitchell families.*



*Wedding of Mick Kotzas and Chrisafena Lucas at Mena Creek, North Queensland, in 1927*

*L. to r. from back row: Paraskevas Kafcaloudis (holding son Con), Paraskevas Kostoglou, Unknown, John Themistocles, Nicholas Kairis, Mrs Millicich, Jack Millicich, Unknown, Mrs Sumich, Unknown, Unknown, Anglican priest, Maria Nikita (holding baby Mary Kotzas), John Tissizis, John Kotzas (holding baby George), Vasiliko Kairis, Evangelia Kostoglou, Chrisafena Kafcaloudis, child unknown, Nicholas Lucas and his mother, Asmina Kalpis, Katina Comino (lady at back), Erini Kotzas, Chrisafena and Mick Kotzas (bride and groom), Theo Kotzas, Despa Kafcaloudis, George Kafcaloudis*

*Sitting: Mary Tissizis, Violet Kostoglou, Mary Kostoglou, Unknown, Mary Kafcaloudis, Chrissie Tissizis, Helen Kafcaloudis*



*Wedding of Stamatis (Sam) Mersiades and Ourania Themistocles at Mena Creek, North Queensland, on 20 January, 1935*



*Wedding of Stathi Makris and Angeliki Kouvara in Brisbane in 1927*  
*Front row (seated): Elizabeth Megaloconomos, Mary A. Freeleagus, Koula Black, Rose Comino, Paul Comino*  
*Front row (standing): John (Gero) Black, Stathi Makris, Angeliki Makris, Peter Spathis, Korina Spathis, Peter Kouvaras*  
*Back row (standing): Anthony Freeleagus, Tassoula Freeleagus, John D. Black, Demosthenes Syrmis, Marika Syrmis*



*Wedding in 1932 at Townsville of George Kyriakakis (Kirk) and Amigdalia (Magdalene) N. Barbouti. Seated: Sylvia Barbouti, Unknown, Unknown, Unknown  
Flower Girl: Evangelia Atherino, Boy left front: Angelo Barboutis  
Standing l. to r.: Manuel N. Barboutis, Unknown, Jack N. Barboutis, George Kyriakakis, Maria N. Barbouti, Nicholas Barboutis, Amigdalia Kyriakaki, Unknown, Mrs Mihali Pavlo (Mick Paul), Emmanuel Atherinos, Mick Paul*



*Wedding of Peter Elisseos and Marianthi Psomas in Biloela in 1938.  
L. to r.: John Psomas, Unknown, Peter Elisseos (groom), Jim Valassi (at rear), Lady at rear Unknown, Marianthi Elisseos (bride), Lady at rear Unknown, Despina Diakospiridon, Antigone Psomas, Zaharoula Loula, Philippas Loula (at rear), Maria Vasiliadou*