

Simon James Pryor first set foot on Crete on Friday, 20 April 2007. A short taxi ride from Chania Airport later, he was wandering through the Old Town of Chania in the early hours before tourists arise. The emotional impact of just the drive into town and the short walk around an ancient city about which he knew nothing was enormous. *Before* meeting Marie Karioti, *before* learning anything about the land upon which he was standing he found himself moved by an unsought but quite palpable sense of belonging. He sent a very simple text message to his wife, Judith Cooke: “Arrived. Paradise.” He found himself overwhelmed, for he could not tell where this incredible sense of connection came from, or even why it had arisen.

Subsequent events and visits served to confirm the connection. But to make sense of it all, Simon Pryor had to come to terms with the two principal elements of this connection.

The first was the unfolding, ever-developing story of the Lindsays of Dundee and their associated families (including, by now, the Cooke-Pryors of Brunswick, Australia), their place, lives and roles in Crete and the nature and history of the landscape and story of human civilisation of Western Crete itself. This first task, Simon Pryor has concluded, will probably never be completed – the story is too rich, too *thick* as Clifford Geertz would say, to ever be something that he and his immediate family could ever hope to fully comprehend. He and his family agree, though, that this isn’t going to stop them having fun trying to!

A lot had happened before Simon Pryor was to visit Marie Karioti that April in 2007. It was a story of an adoptee in search of a mother and finding, unintentionally but gloriously fortuitously, a welcoming extended family. It involved discovering that an uncomfortably adopted heritage and family of distinctly English tone was one that actually could be shed, albeit forever acknowledged, in search of connections through blood. It meant exploring the possibilities of a new-found Dundonian heritage. It was a lesson in patience, growing to understand it was entirely appropriate that members of the family associated with an Irish/Australian father were not willing, as yet, to explore the meaning of the change brought to their family story by a liaison between Naples and Southampton in late 1954. It was a story that brought out the impact one adoption of a tiny baby boy could have on the lives of so many. Indeed it was a story where adoption appeared to be a predominant theme, with Simon Pryor’s natural grandmother being born Evanthea Themaki in the Cretan village of Tsikalaria and then adopted as Eva Lindsay. But yes, overall it was a story of welcome. Welcome of the grown new-comer, actually born Simon James Lindsay, by the Lindsays of Dundee and New Zealand and Marie Karioti of Chania, Crete. Welcome by Judith Cooke, Simon, Kathleen and Alice Pryor of the heritage offered by new-found Scottish, New Zealand and Cretan relatives.

And so they met, these ‘Cretan Cousins’, Marie Karioti and Simon Pryor. “Ahh, sit you doon,” said an entirely Cretan woman to her Australian relative in a broad Scottish accent. Simon Pryor laughed with delight at the unexpected, yet, with hindsight, quite obvious fact that Marie Karioti’s Lindsay clan heritage would mean that she would learn from her family to speak Scottish English and not the androgynous stuff they teach in international schools and the like. Since then, over the space of four years they have spent many days together and shared Cretan terrain, food, wine, finger lace and history and, as much as anything else, stories and friends. It is this relationship that has shaped much of Simon Pryor’s quite visceral sense of connectedness to Crete and its development will enrich immeasurably his daughters and their families as they fathom their individual connections to the land of their forebears.

One keen connection between the lands of Crete, Scotland, New Zealand and Australia came about in 2009, when, on Sunday, 14 June, Simon Pryor's mother, Eva Margaret Nancy Payne passed away whilst Simon, Judith Cooke and Kathleen Pryor were in Crete visiting Marie Karioti. It is possible to sense the influence exerted by where Simon Pryor was when his mother died when you read the words he wrote for her funeral in New Zealand a week later. There clearly were ties that bound. Nancy Payne's funeral was conducted by the Returned Services Association, for she was now a fallen soldier herself. But their ties to Crete are extraordinary – the Maori Regiment's role in Crete during WWII is legendary in both countries. They were moved by Nancy Payne's personal history and its connections to so many others of their fallen comrades. Nancy Payne's other sons, John and Ted Payne, were struck by the richer understanding their mother's Cretan heritage gave them of all that they knew and remembered of their lives with her in Africa and New Zealand. So much so, that they readily acceded to Nancy Payne's wish that her ashes, like those of her mother, Eva Lindsay (Themaki), in 1954, be scattered on Souda Bay in Crete. Indeed, they undertook to travel with as many of the broader Lindsay family as they could to Crete in 2011 to help do just that.

Crete will forever be one of the most powerful motifs in the growing story of the Lindsays, particularly for Simon Pryor and his immediate family.

The second element of Simon Pryor's journey involved trying to answer the question; why did any of this mean - to use a common Australian expression - anything more than two thirds of bugger all to an Australian adult? An adult who proudly calls Brunswick home and whose trace memories of formative years are predominantly about a little boy growing up in the playgrounds of an old WWII aerodrome and the green fields of England! This, it has seemed to Simon Pryor, touches on things that are uncomfortably mystical.

Courtesy of his wife's connections with friends and colleagues who support indigenous students in Australian Universities and the luminous writing of a past colleague of his own, Bruce Pascoe (*Block*, Penguin, 2009), he knew of the fundamental connection an Australian Aboriginal can have to The Land. He felt that the way Bruce Pascoe wrote about this, lyrical as his writing is, showed that his protagonist's dawning understanding of his connection to the oceans, rivers and red and brown soils of Australia was, ultimately, not particularly mystical, but, from the perspective of both humans and the land, drawn from something eminently, tangibly, practical. And, it seemed to him, a distinctively indigenous Australian heritage; a relationship born of 50,000 years of contiguous human occupation in a wide, brown land. Simon Pryor remembers being envious of the personal discoveries Bruce Pascoe had made, feeling that nothing quite like that could ever happen to him.

Of course, he was right. Nothing quite like that could happen to him. But something else did. And at least Bruce Pascoe's writing forewarned him about the journey he was on.

Each time Simon Pryor returned to Crete; the further he walked the varied, wonderfully wild (yet entirely transformed by human occupation) terrain; the more he learned about the Lindsays of Crete; the closer he became to his 'Cretan Cousin', Marie Karioti; the more Marie's friends taught Simon Pryor about the history and landscape of the island; well, the greater his conviction grew that this was where, as he started blurting out, '*my blood comes from*'. He found it was landscapes, buildings, farmlands, winds, smells, tastes that most made him feel as if he had always belonged to Western Crete – even though he had been over fifty years old before ever seeing the place. It really was possible, he learned, for a human being to

care for place, to feel as if his bounty was from its bounty, its struggles his struggles, his future always bound to its future. Simon Pryor found this to be transformative.

Transformative?

Yes, because *connection* meant no longer *searching*. This was, Simon Pryor found, a big change to the way he viewed life. He was no longer a supplicant in search of a past to lend meaning to an otherwise insignificant life. Instead, he was of Cretan origin and he could relax and let all else flow from that. It was as if his own 'thin' human construction; the way he actually saw colour, smelled smells, heard sounds, understood humour, felt weather on flesh all made so much more sense once it was clear that this had all been borne of the 'thick' cultural and genetic soup that is Crete.

More than a motif, Crete is the place that begins and informs just who Simon Pryor is.

Wednesday, 19 to Friday, 21 May 2010