

## ***Joice NanKivell Loch.***

***1887-1982.***

Joice NanKivell was a journalist, an aid-worker and an author. She led an amazing life and would be one of the most highly decorated women in Australia's history.

She would play an important role in the time that was known as the Greek Tragedy in 1922. This was a time when there were over 1.5 million Greeks who were living outside Greece and at Smyrna over 200,000 men women and children were massacred by the Turks as they fled back to their home country. The survivors of this ethnic cleansing would escape to Greece which was then one of the poorest countries in the area.

Like Agnes Bennett, Joice wanted to become a Doctor but did not have the money to pay for the University course. She would work as a medical orderly with the Quaker Famine Relief organisation but would never become a Quaker.

Joice was born in 1887 at Farnham in Queensland. Her family owned a huge sugar-cane plantation which was managed by her father. His brothers managed several other plantations nearby.

Joice was born at the height of a cyclone and her mother had to be assisted by Daisy, an indentured Pacific Islander who had been kidnapped by "blackbirders" and with many others brought to Queensland to work as labourers on the cane fields.

Joice and her brother Geoff were raised by Daisy and would have a close loving relationship with their servant. They had a playmate, a part aborigine boy named Tinker who died when he was taken by a crocodile when the children were swimming. Joice, as a result of her contacts with Daisy and Tinker would develop a great concern for the plight of the homeless and underprivileged.

When the Queensland Government ruled that the "Kanaka" labour must stop, the large plantation became unproductive and would soon become worthless. In the searing heat, with deadly mosquitoes, scrub ticks and disease bearing rats Joice's father and his brothers with their white overseers attempted to cut the cane themselves but they were soon ill and when bitten by a rat many died of "Leptospirosis".

Joice's mother struggled to run the huge homestead with little income and no staff. One day they were drinking French wines and dining on prime beef. They were then reduced to living on "kangaroo stew and parrot pie".

The plantations were heavily mortgaged and soon the family was selling off all of the furniture and livestock to retain the properties. The bank would foreclose and the NanKivell family would have to walk away with nothing.

Joice's father took a job on a sheep station in Gippsland and the family was to now live in a tin shed with a dirt floor. It had no running water or sanitation and was infested with mice and snakes. Joice had to grow up fast. She had to cook, clean, tend lambs, raise calves and look after shearers and farm workers.

The dream of a good education was gone forever.

During the Bank crash of the 1890's the farm went bust and once more the family was without work. Joice's father turned to drink and was soon unable to make a living. Her mother, worn out with work and worry, suffered from depression. Joice and brother Geoff found work as stockmen and were able to keep their family together.

Joice's uncle Harry was a Doctor and he came to visit and was called on to tend a young girl who lived nearby who needed emergency treatment. Uncle Harry decided to operate on the girl and had to use the kitchen table for the work. He asked Joice to assist and the operation was a success. Uncle Harry praised Joice for her work and gave her some medical books to study. Joice became good at sewing up wounded animals and would save the family the cost of many vet's fees.

Joice wrote a book "The Cobweb Ladder" and it was published but sales were few as the 1914-18 War was taking place.

Her brother Geoff, like many young Australians would enlist and die in the Great War. The family decided to sell their farm and Joice was now free to write and to have a life in the City. She found a job reviewing books for the Melbourne Sun Herald. She also found work as the Secretary to the Professor of Classics at Melbourne University and she was introduced to the world of Greek Classical History. It would give her a great yearning to go to Greece.

In 1916 Joice reviewed a book written by a Gallipoli hero, Sydney Loch . It was about the Dardanelles Campaign and would be a best seller. The two young people became good friends and it was not long before romance blossomed. In 1918, as the Great War ended, Joice and Sydney were married.

Joice's father did not approve of the marriage as he believed that there was no future in writing. Joice's mother was very pleased and told the newly-weds that they should go overseas and find a new life in the wider World. She gave Joice a small Australian flag which would always have pride of place wherever Joice would travel.

In London the couple were soon working on Fleet Street as journalists and were sent to Dublin to write about "The Troubles" there. There they were befriended by the Irish Literati who were supporters of the Sinn Fein who were supporting "Home Rule for Ireland". At this time Ireland was swarming with armed thugs, known as "The Black and Tan" who had been recruited by the British Government. Michael Collins and the IRA were busy planting bombs and many local people were being killed or maimed by these devices.

Sydney and Joice would write their book, "Ireland in Travail" which they hoped would reflect the viewpoint from both sides. The Sinn Fein declared that Sydney was a British spy and when Michael Collins was murdered the Lochs decided that it was time to leave Ireland. They decided to head for Poland as the "Quaker Famine Relief Fund" was offering free train ride and free board and lodging for volunteers.

Eastern Poland had been devastated by Lenin's troops who had destroyed Polish and Ukrainian villages and killed most of the inhabitants. The refugees were dying of typhoid and malnutrition. Joice and Sydney and other Quakers were living in a railway carriage and every day they were besieged by bands of refugees who were starving and pleading for food. In a desperate attempt to raise money for food relief Joice wrote many articles to the British Press asking for urgent help. It was all in vain.

Sydney organised horse teams to plough the land and grow grain and this was one of the success stories of this terrible time. Sydney and Joice even went to Moscow to plead for assistance and had some success there.

President Pilsudski was able to get the Polish Republic moving again and gradually the desperate times were put behind the struggling Nation. In gratitude for their valuable work Sydney and Joice were decorated by the Polish Prime Minister on behalf of the Polish Government.

Joice heard about the massacre of the Greeks at Smyrna and that there was a need for volunteers to help the 2 million refugees there. They finished their work in Poland by setting up an orphanage and a farm school for Polish children and they set off for Thessaloniki.

They were shocked to see the many thousands of Greek refugees who had escaped from Turkey with few possessions. Many had lived in Turkey all their lives and they only spoke Turkish.

Joice and Sydney lived at Thessaloniki at the "American Farm School" which was near the old Scottish Women's Hospital which had been established by Dr, Agnes Bennett in WW1. They were soon busy giving inoculations against typhoid and trying to feed the sick and the dying. The Lochs worked tirelessly for the refugees who were gradually rehoused in villages of concrete-block houses built by the poor Greek Government.

All this time Joice was busy writing articles for the British and the Australian Press.

At the village of Pargos, which was dominated by a Byzantine Tower, the Lochs brought medicines and grain to help the people who were suffering there. The people in Pargos were grateful for the help given and the Mayor offered the Lochs the use of the Tower at a very low rent. They decided that it would be a good place for them to settle down in as the Greek crisis was now almost over.

The local people cleaned out the Tower and electricity was installed. The Lochs decided that they would live there and write books. It was not to be the life that Joice had anticipated. From the first day, the local villagers, who had never had any medical assistance, came to the door asking for help.

Joice discovered that there were several women in the village who could weave rugs but they did not have the money to buy a loom. So she went to Athens and purchased a loom and soon had many women making rugs. Joice would design these rugs and insisted that they use Byzantine rather than Turkish motifs. So the "Pirgos Women's Rug Weaving Coop" was born.

Joice would learn the art of rug weaving and dyeing the wool. During the years that followed Joice would sell many Pirgos rugs to people in Britain, America and Australia. Today these rugs are no longer made and they command very high prices from Art Collectors. The name Pirgos has also gone and the tourist town is now called Ouranoupolis.

In 1939, as the village was celebrating a wedding at which the Lochs were the honoured guests, Hitler invaded Poland.

Sydney was asked to head a new Quaker Relief Mission to Poland and Joice was appointed as head of the Friends Relief Mission in Bucharest in Rumania. Their task was to assist the thousands of Polish and Jewish people who were escaping from the Nazis.

Joice said goodbye to the wonderful friends in Greece and she packed her suitcase with her old typewriter, her medical books and her little Aussi flag and headed off into dander once again.

In Bucharest which was once a great city with wide streets, fashionable shops fine cafes and restaurants and fashionable women, was now a city of begging, starving people. Many Polish and Jewish refugees had been interned by King Carol who was anxious to please Hitler. Many men were fleeing to Britain and France to join the Free Polish Army.

Joice tried to arrange visas for the terrified women and children who were trying to escape without much success.

The British Government gave much needed assistance and the Lochs arranged for many desperate refugees to escape a dreadful fate at the hands of the Nazis, The pro-Nazi Rumanian Iron Guard was busy rounding up the Jewish refugees and sending them to concentration camps. They arrested high profile Jews and hung them on meat hooks for all to see.

Joice and Sydney were each decorated by King Carol for their services to Rumania. The King and his mistress, Magda Lupescu would also escape and go into exile in Portugal. It is believed that he took much of the Nation's gold reserves with him.

The Lochs knew that they must get out of the Country and Sydney hired a river steamer and with a group of male Polish refugees, all on forged passports, escaped to Constantinople and freedom.

Joice took a large group of Jewish women and children by river steamer all the way to Palestine by way of Constantinople, and Cyprus. Her ship was attacked by German planes but was not badly damaged.

The Lochs managed to have 2,000 refugees escape from certain death at the hands of the Nazi forces.

This operation was named Operation Pied Piper and is well recorded in their book "Blue Ribbons, Bitter Bread" which is a story of great courage and compassion.

In the final years of WW2, the Lochs cared for thousands of Polish orphans whose parents had been murdered in Stalin's gulags. These Polish children were released when Britain started to give aid to Communist Russia.

Joice fought for her orphans to receive clothing, food, housing and schools. There are many people, today who say that they were saved by Joice Loch and her Camp of a Thousand Orphans.

At the end of WW2 the Lochs returned to their Tower in Greece and with the help of their friendly villagers they cleaned up their war damaged home and set about once again rebuilding the lives of the people who had suffered the horrors of the War.

Joice began to once again raise funds from Britain and Australia to start up the Rug Making business and soon the village was once again saved from starvation and despair.

The Greek Government awarded the Lochs another high decoration.

In 1955 Sydney Loch, aged 66, died. Joice lived on for another 27 years and would continue to love and care for the people of Pírgos. She bought exhibitions of the beautiful rugs to Australia which were well received and with the money she was able to bring a good supply of unpolluted water to her village. She also wrote several books and used the money from these to bring further benefits to the village.

At the grand age of 95, Joice Loch died in her beloved Tower home. This remarkable woman was mourned by hundreds of monks and villagers. Australian, British and American officials came to pay their Countries' respects. The Governor of Macedonia represented the Greek Government. A Greek Orthodox Bishop, who was also an Oxford Don, gave the Oration in which he named her;

"As one of the most significant women of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Century".

Joice is buried beside her beloved husband in the small cemetery at Pírgos.

The Byzantine Museum Authority has now restored the Loch's home. It is now called Museum. The Tower of Prosforion of Ouranopolis.

It now, is the "Joice Loch Memorial"

In Australia there is now a fine Memorial to Joice Loch. In 2002, in the presence of the Greek Consul, Alex Freeleagus, who had done a great deal to establish Joice's reputation in Australia, the Mayor of Ingham and a representative of the Queensland Government unveiled a brass plaque in Ingham's Botanical Gardens.

This plaque gives details of Joice NanKivell and details of her achievements.

Joice NanKivell Loch is Australia' most decorated woman and one of the World's most decorated women. She was awarded 11 medals.

***Poland's Gold Cross of Merit.***

***Serbian Order of St Salvia.***

***Greek Order of Pheonix.***

***Greek Order of the Redeemer.***

***Greek Order of the Redeemer (Higher Grade.)***

***Gold Medal of the Greek National Academy of the Arts.***

***British MBE.***

***Romanian Order Of Elizabeth. Polish Gold Cross of Virtue.***

***Greek Order of Beneficence.***

***Greek Order of Beneficence. (Higher Grade)***

***Polish Gold Cross of Virtue.***

Joice Loch was a remarkable woman who is not well known in Australia. We have failed to tell children in our schools about her and her achievements.

**1887-1982.**

**A MOST AMAZING LIFE.**

***[John Imrie, July 2021]***