

# Under the grill- Growing up Egyptian-Greek in Australia

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If there's one aspect of Australian culture that has infiltrated our combined cultures, it's barbecues. Barbecues for birthdays, anniversaries, the Melbourne Cup or just because my Pappou (grandfather) bought a tonne of meat on sale.

To be honest, I do not know any better way to celebrate.

Such occasions are never planned; they're expected. As the closest to my Pappou's house, my mum, sister and myself would arrive first. Not before bringing something extra, of course. That, too, needs no explanation.

The earlier we arrived, the better. There was always something to do, even if it was pointless to the cause. Like cleaning the uncleanable, 'just in case someone else comes.'

Spoiler alert: no one does.

I remember the time Pappou's cousin was coming from Sydney to visit. The barbecue was being manned by the meat-machine (Pappou) when he asked me to scrub the inside of his kitchen cupboards and line it with some cheap contact that looked like wood. To this day, I still do not know what possessed him, because when I had completed it, sweating like a kebab on the grill (and squealing for air like one too), he came and flashed a cheeky grin. "Your *yiayia* (grandmother) never did it. I've never cleaned it in 15 years!"

Aside from the senseless scrubbing, the issue of meat itself was a hot topic. My mum and our family are Muslim, and for obvious reasons we could not eat the same meat that my Pappou or aunty's family would prefer. My Pappou would go out of his way to buy 'your meat' even if it 'costs too much money' and he 'doesn't understand why.' Anything related to Muslims or Egyptians was automatically mine: 'your people', 'your war', 'your Book' and the ever popular, 'you're crazy.'

It wasn't just meat on the barbie. Whilst we had claimed the act of outdoor grilling as Greek (or Egyptian, depending on who you ask), we still added our own flair, to guard us from the 'bland blood meat' of the Aussies. Examples included the over represented stuffed vegetables burnt to leatheriness, a compulsory side to any meat dish. "Fayy! Eat!" my Pappou would beg, "or you gonna be sick!"

The three dips and salads always at the table further imprinted the preconception that Mediterranean people only ate salads and dips. Clearly we weren't doing each other any favours.

It wasn't just food served at the table. Dinners were the perfect opportunity to show off or criticise the accomplishments, both good and bad, of the extended family. The first football kick became a Brownlow Medal nomination, a new word learnt an essay written.

The conversations in multiple languages made all our dinners a sight for sore eyes.

Every meal would begin and end with our different prayers in different languages from different religions. On the outside, we couldn't look more diverse and different.

Perhaps there are only two things that bind our family, except from blood: a hate for bland, bloody meat and a love of football.