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FOREWORD

If Australia is a multicultural society, Joseph Assaf's is a multicultural life. To take one small but revealing example, dinners with his family are a rich, warm and delicious mixture of Lebanese and Italian influences, transformed beyond their origins by the easy openness of the Australian environment and the sheer range of people from different cultures you will find around his table.

In important ways, Joseph's life has depended critically on the need to communicate effectively with others. So it is hardly surprising that communications became the area in which he successfully built a business, and a new sort of business at that, drawing upon all the lessons he had learned.

From his arrival in Australia as a migrant from Lebanon, 'in someone else's shoes' as he poignantly explains in these pages, the author has not just been living a multicultural life, he has been thinking about it and reflecting on its meaning. Why do multicultural societies work? What are the challenges they face? How can they work better? What can we learn from each other?

The relentless energy and curiosity, and the sense of life's adventure that originally brought the author from his small village in Lebanon to the other side of the world, is evident in the pages that follow. From a kaleidoscope of cultural influences, Joseph has spent a lifetime drawing strength and lessons.

This book is, in part, a memoir of an immigrant's life — full of the transforming and revealing experiences only available to someone brave enough to leave the comfort zone of what the author calls his own 'cultural state'. It is also a reflection (on the social approach we have come to refer to as 'multiculturalism') by someone who has thought about it and worked with it for decades. In some ways this is a very practical book. It looks not at the theory of multiculturalism (though it certainly deals with its philosophy) but at its practical impact on the real world. For example, it draws lessons from experience in discussing citizenship, or how language affects our understanding of the world and the impact this has on marketing.

And in some ways it is a book focussed on Australia — its past and its future. It deals with our national identity, what it means to be Australian, and how that is changing. Based on forty years of

affectionate observation, it provides one man's reflections on what we have become as a country and what we should aspire to.

Most importantly, the lessons Joseph Assaf has learned and wants to impart to his readers are not addressed to particular tribes or groups or nationalities but to all of us as humans, learning to live effectively and rewardingly with each other. Poking away, as he puts it, at 'the flames of hope for a better world'.

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