

Panos: My Life, My Odyssey

Jada Brookes reads Panos Papadopoulos' long-awaited autobiography *Panos: My Life, My Odyssey*, which speaks about his childhood, business model and life experiences.



Images courtesy of LID Publishing

Panos Papadopoulos' extraordinary account of his life in the autobiography *Panos: My Life, My Odyssey* is driven by passion, love and respect. It is a life story combined with self-help guidance in principles and business values that may prompt you to examine the circumstances in your life. You'd nod your head in agreement, frown at some of the narrative or gasp in disbelief as Panos details the unfolding events that have moulded his path.

The author's journey from a child born into a low-income family in Greece struggling to survive, to building a multi-million-dollar fashion empire, Panos Emporio, is phenomenal. In the book, he describes his parents in detail, their humble beginnings and work ethics, and the fundamental values they lived by and taught their children. Panos' father completed three years of schooling before the onslaught of the Second World War, and his mother, who did not get the opportunity to go to school, was illiterate.

The atypical rags-to-riches story, where a person usually gets discovered and has 'overnight' success, is not Panos' narrative. The autobiography is filled with obstacles, triumphs, determination, strength and the

motivation to achieve his goals. Panos visualises his path even when he lacks the experience but progresses forward and eliminates anything that gets in his way. His decision to live a better life at age six drove his desire to make it a reality because "poverty equalled endless torment."

Panos was mature beyond his years, from a determined child whose early entrepreneurship helped a shop owner sell goods that had been gathering dust for years to selling insurance at 15. "By the time I was 17, I was acting as though I was 30-40." His beliefs centred on his parents' values and his fight against the injustice of injured or dying factory workers. His attempt to expose an examiner, who exchanged cash for exam passes and moved to Sweden because Greece had failed him, shows his strength.

Sweden came with its challenges: he was called malaka (arsehole) while working in the restaurant kitchens and was hesitant to go to nightclubs to avoid being beaten up as he was a black skull (person with dark hair). Two male teachers at the university also propositioned him. He was threatened with serving three years in Greece after his deferral military service application was

denied but persevered with the help of Greek friends, who had moved to the country before him, and an estranged wife's parents.

Panos' passion for helping people in prisons, care homes or schools is heartwarming. His alternative methods included holding an older person's hand and listening to their stories rather than reading the newspapers to them. He worked with low-grade students, addressed their issues, and stood up to a dangerous criminal in the prison where he worked as a guard. When someone told him something could not be done, Panos often proved them wrong and presented a solution.

A forward-thinking man, Panos never worried about a business plan or if he had enough start-up capital; he did the opposite and took calculated risks. "No risks, no history." When he was young, helping to build a wall, his father said, "Today, our neighbour should have been here to help me, but changed his mind at the last minute. Remember one thing in life: never wait for someone else to solve your problems. Your life is in your hands. Do not expect solutions from someone else."

Panos provides a lot of advice from his experiences working in different fields. When he worked for the shipping company at age 19, he discovered the supervisor was making money on the black market by stealing alcohol from the company and sharing the proceeds with the other staff. Years later, the company discovered there had been large staff thefts that accounted for most of its turnover. "It's a lesson for all businesses: don't let the rot set in, because when it does, it will surely spread."

He also suggests doing something that gives you joy. "Money comes when we do the things we love because they are the right things. We have to choose if we are to do the things we love or the things we should." After starting his small collection for his brand Panos Emporio and doing market research on what women thought of swimwear, he said, "I knew the market would open to me if I listened, and responded, and gave people what they dreamed of. No one else at that time had listened."

With a marketing budget close to zero, Panos relied on continuous education, taking short courses to master additional aspects of the business, stay on top of things, and get a leg up on the competition. "My business philosophy was that I should lead and always be in first place." He appreciated honesty and simplicity, which are essential in business relationships and accepting who you are. "Honest business people will always love honest partners and see great value in helping you develop your business."

In the book, readers are treated to colour and black and white photographs of him and his family, such as Panos working as a corrections guard and teacher, overseeing production and fittings in the factory for his brand, the swimwear shots and celebrating their tenth anniversary

at a show in 1996. He is also captured shaking hands with the Greek President, Karolos Papoulias, in the presence of HM King Carl XVI Gustaf and emerging out of a limousine to celebrate 25 years of Panos Emporio.

The founder's success with securing the most talked-about woman in Sweden, Jannike Björling, tennis star Björn Borg's ex-girlfriend and the almost swimwear photoshoot with Whitney Houston is captured here. His friendship with Hermes CEO Jean-Louis and his wife Rena and an audience with King Constantine II and Queen Anne-Marie of Greece, who were exiled after the monarchy was abolished in 1973, show the extent of his circle.

There is so much valuable information, events, personal and dangerous encounters, and heartwarming moments; too numerous to mention in this review. *Panos: My Life, My Odyssey* is a highly pleasurable read; with the most minute details and human endeavours, you virtually know everything you need about Panos Papadopoulos. He allows the reader into his intimate space with the good and ugly and leaves nothing unturned.

Panos: My Life, My Odyssey by Panos Papadopoulos with Jack Yan, founder and publisher of Lucire, is published by LID Publishing and available online at LID Publishing, Amazon, WHSmith and other participating retailers.

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