

## REVIEW: GLOBAL SCOTS

*Kenny Kemp*

Kenny MacAskill and Henry McLeish, **Global Scots: Voices From Afar**,  
Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2005, 265 pp, pb, £9.99, ISBN 1905222378

In September 2006, Scotland's Enterprise Minister Nicol Stephen was able to welcome 600 guests to a gala dinner held at the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. It was the culmination of the biggest gathering of expatriate Scottish business leaders and entrepreneurs at the inaugural Globalscot conference. By all accounts, it was quite an event, with Scots from the diaspora networking with new-found business contacts from their homeland. There was a huge sense of energy and goodwill which can only benefit Scotland at large.

The whole concept of 'Global Scots' has been around since 2002 when Wendy Alexander, one of the previous Enterprise Ministers, set up a website to keep track of overseas-based Scots. But, in many cases, a lot of the plaudits should have gone to Henry McLeish, who was Scotland's very First Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning in 1999. He went on to become First Minister but, when I interviewed him back in 1999 for a business feature article in the **Sunday Herald**, he talked about how we must do much more to engage and utilise the vast network of global Scots who ran and contributed to successful businesses around the world. He was right. In retrospect, Henry McLeish was never given enough credit for his work with the enterprise brief. The untimely death of first First Minister Donald Dewar catapulted McLeish into the top job, when he was still learning the ropes about business and enterprise. He still had much to do but he always displayed genuine interest in making it work.

What McLeish and his former political adversary Kenny MacAskill, a leading member of the Scottish National Party, an MSP and now Cabinet Secretary for

---

*Kenny Kemp is a journalist and business writer living in Scotland and the author of several books, including **Entrepreneurial Scotland: Portraits of Inspiration**, *The Entrepreneurial Exchange*, 2006.*

*Review: Global Scots*

Justice, have tried to do is capture some of the key Global Scots in this book. Between them they have produced over 30 interviews, mainly as a result of their political connections and introductions. MacAskill undertakes more than two-thirds of the interviews, with some obviously sneaked in on his regular jaunts with the Tartan Army.

Unfortunately, I feel it does not really work well and the tone is of uncritical admiration for a band of Scots who have gone furth to make their mark on life. The book reads like a series of couthy picture postcards – written by M&M in the first person – with no real depth or analysis about why the subject chose to leave Scotland. Indeed, most interviews are barely more than extended curriculum vitae. The authors say simply that ‘we wanted to seek out these members of the wider Scottish family and write this book ... beyond that there was no agenda, and no constraints were set upon what could be said or commented on.’

Perhaps one theme that did manage to come through was the subjects’ pride in their Scottish identity and a gratitude for what they had received in Scotland. As the authors say: ‘Education and egalitarianism were acknowledged uniformly. Most acknowledged a work ethic and strong community values.’

MacAskill and McLeish were right to point out that what was missing in Scotland was ‘opportunity’. This lack of opportunity could not have been better exemplified than through the interview with Andy Mooney, the chairman of Disney Consumer products. He has reached the top at Nike and now Disney by heading to pastures new in America. Many of the subjects, including Mooney, highlight Scotland’s lack of self-belief and self-esteem, although conferences such as the Globalscot in Edinburgh are slowly changing this perception. It is a recurring theme in this book.

One of the subjects, corporate lawyer Alison Duncan, now living in Washington, said: ‘It’s hard to talk about what Scotland did not give me. The expatriate lament is that everyone cares about Scotland except for the Scots.’ Dr Jill Savege Scharff, a Washington psychotherapist, says Scotland’s drink problem lies at the root of many issues: ‘Scotland has a culture that alcohol is a big part of. People take a drink to feel better, to feel freer, but alcohol creates depression, and then there is a vicious circle. Health boards need to look at that. A lot of that is educating children too ... I can’t remember getting taught anything about alcohol or social culture, even in high school.’

There are nuggets in this book, yet many of the subjects merit better in-depth

### *Scottish Affairs*

journalistic research and a bit of probing. M&M often write like fans with typewriters rather than objective interviewers. One or two of those included only seem to be added because they are Scots who live outside of Scotland and have done very little to merit such elevation. I am sure running a St Andrew's Society or playing soccer in Miami is interesting, but I do not feel this qualifies for inclusion in a book of this nature.

But perhaps one of the biggest flaws of this tome is the geographical selection of interviews which was skewed heavily towards North American and parts of Europe. While it is true that most of the diaspora headed to America and Canada, many more have gone to Australia and indeed Africa and Asia. This book has no sense of balance about this factor. Consequently, the book dissolves into a series of loose discussions with friends and easy-to-meet people who fitted into a political or social schedule rather than a methodical attempt to cover the globe. While I applaud the concept, I think the execution has been poor. I found this book genuinely disappointing and a missed opportunity. The flaccid writing style of both M&M really does not help much either. This is a pity because the majority of the subjects are worthy role-models for many of us living and working back in the mither country.

*October 2006*