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Granddaughter honours Hooker

NATALIA Hooker, the granddaughter of Sir Leslie J. Hooker, has written a biography of her famous ancestor who founded a real estate empire in Australia.

Living in Europe didn't stop the sister of the current owner – Janusz Hooker, who bought the company back into family hands for \$67 million in 2009 – from coming to Australia for two months of each year of her research that stretched over six years.

“My grandfather was a huge advocate of university education as he had no choice in his own life but to leave high school at age 13,” Ms Hooker said.

“I took that to heart, and studied three degrees, commerce at ANU and two postgraduate law degrees, one in London and one in New York.

“I worked in law firms, and then in real estate finance in New York for four years, but I must say that my creative side was always eating at me. I moved to Europe in 2001 to pursue a creative career.”

Ms Hooker now works in publishing, selling Australian and American illustrated adult and children's books to Eastern European, Russian and Greek publishers who then translate them to their own languages.

“I work (from) my home in Barcelona and attend all the major European book fairs,” she said.

L.J. Hooker was her paternal grandfather. So, what surprised her from her research?

“On the heritage side, the reason that my grandfather in 1925 chose to use the name Hooker as his surname surprised me (he was born Leslie Joseph Tingyou),” Ms Hooker said.

“We previously had no idea that L.J.'s mother had married a man called 'Hookin' (Hook Yin) While we are not sure whether he is L.J.'s biological father, it deepened the Chinese ties since this man was a father figure to L.J.

“L.J. grew up in a Chinese-speaking household in Canterbury and later Beecroft, Sydney.”

She said her grandfather was

responsible for building tens of thousands of Australian homes when they were much needed during the post-war growth years.

He also constructed some of Sydney's first skyscrapers, his company owned and managed some of Australia's biggest cattle properties, and he gave generously to support the Australian Olympic team, the deaf and blind, hospitals and many other causes.

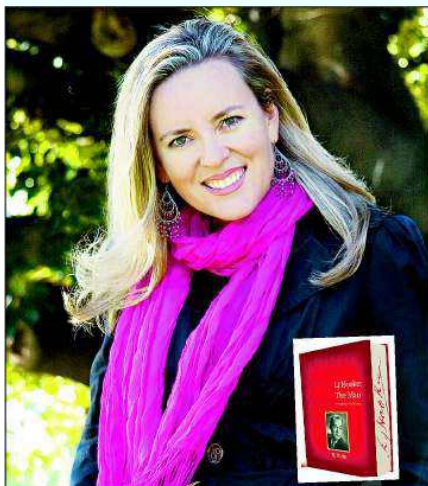
“He came from absolutely nothing and reached phenomenal success,” she said.

Unlike her brother, Ms Hooker is not working directly for the company her grandfather founded.

“(But) I communicate quite regularly now with the franchises about the book,” she said.

“It's been great for them to learn more about the foundations of the business name that they work under.”

■ *LJ Hooker The Man*, Macmillan, RRP \$54.95, www.ljhookertheman.com.



Author Natalia Hooker and, inset, the book cover.