

SUMMARY

Interview with **Katina Andrianopoulos**

Interviewer: Helen Haltis

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The interview was conducted in Greek.

Katina Andrianopoulos nee Moutsouris was born in 1936 in Kakorema, a small village in the Prefecture of Messinia in a small farming plot where they practiced subsistence agriculture. She was the fourth of six children in the family. Hard work Katina recalls as they all had to combine their efforts regardless of age to maintain a reasonable standard of living. As there was always work to be done, her schooling was eventually disrupted so she only managed to complete grade four.

Acutely aware of their predicament, Katina's parents strove to create better opportunities for their children so they sent their oldest child a daughter, to become a seamstress in Kalamata. Later she was joined by her two brothers. The parents then purchased a house for the young people so they could support themselves.

Katina in the meantime, being the older of the three siblings left behind, felt the pressure as there were a lot more chores placed on her small shoulders. She hated her life as it was, and the mere thought of being married to someone in the near future in a similar predicament as her parents, depressed her. She wanted to escape!

Her father had spent a few years in America. On his return, he brought some books and some pamphlets back which he kept in a drawer. This included a map of Australia. Katina didn't know why it was there, but for some reason it attracted her attention and she always tried to imagine what life was like in that place.

When she was old enough, her parents sent her to Kalamata as well where she was apprenticed to become a hairdresser. There she became good friends with another apprentice and together they decided to apply for the assisted passage to Australia in the capacity of Domestic Service.

Katina's father was not very happy about this, but he respected her decision and helped her with the preliminary processes. He rented a place in Athens where she could attend classes run by the ICEM (Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration). The course was intended to assist young women in finding employment as domestic aids in Australia. The classes consisted of instruction in domestic service and were designed to teach the elements of household care, maintenance of modern household equipment as well as elementary English classes. Upon completion of the course which took approximately two months, the girls having reached the necessary level of competency received their certificates from the Australian Consul General.

Twenty year old Katina together with 28 girls from the course boarded Flaminia and headed to Australia. Approximately 22 days later they arrived on the 18th of August, 1958. The trip itself was enjoyable because Katina found her girlfriend to be good company. Her first

impressions of Australia were mixed. Fremantle she thought looked strange but Melbourne was better. Her destination however and her friend's was Adelaide as they knew people who lived there.

At Port Melbourne all the girls were met by Immigration officials. 25 of them were taken away (perhaps to a hostel), while Katina, her friend and another girl were taken to the train station and sent to Adelaide. From there they were taken to a hostel (she is not certain where in Adelaide that was) where they stayed, approximately three weeks while waiting to be approached by prospective employers.

A lady by the name of Mrs Moores came to the hostel and signed up Katina's friend as a domestic help. The two friends however pleaded to be together or near each other for support. Mrs Moores was sympathetic to this request and took both girls with the Immigration official's consent and with the promise to find Katina suitable employment as soon as possible. Within two weeks Katina was assigned to a Mrs Brown who was looking for a live-in domestic aid. She had three young children and one more on the way. More importantly she wanted a nanny for the youngest little girl as the two older children were of school age. Her house was about half an hour's walk away from Mrs Moores so Katina was happy to take on the position.

The Brown family was quite well to do, owning a furniture factory and several stores. One of Mr Brown's furniture stores was on Anzac Highway while their house was located near Glenelg. In addition to the usual domestic chores, her main job was caring for the little two year old girl and she taught her to speak Greek (as Katina could not speak English). The little girl adored Katina and always referred to her as "mummy", something that gave Katina immense satisfaction. She remembers the Brown family for their friendship and welcoming her into their home.

She worked for six days straight with Sundays off which was shared equally by visits to her friend, as well as a family known to her parents. The problem was her weekly remuneration of four pounds was too low to enable her to save enough to bring her younger sister, Dimitra, to Adelaide. Katina advised her sister to do the same course as she did and come to Australia with the assisted passage (ICEM) as domestic servant. However, Katina would sign and accept responsibility for her and so she would not have to go and work for an Australian family.

Even though the travel costs were to be met by Australia, there were other expenses involved especially accommodation and everyday living, and there were no guaranties about employment prospects. For this reason Katina left the Brown household and rented a room in a family friend's house. With their help she went grape picking in Reynella for two or three weeks and subsequently found permanent work at Holden at the Woodville plant. Later, when Holden started operating at Elizabeth, she was shifted there where she earned close to 11 pounds per week or 12 pounds if there was a little overtime and close to 18 pounds for a seven day week.

Her work involved the stretching of the springs which were used in the car seats. Not a heavy job but monotonous and robotic. She was expected to stretch 5000 pieces per day but once the technique was mastered she easily exceeded this, something that created problems with co-workers as the management expected more from everybody.

One day however, she experienced some pains in her legs, which intensified with time and soon it became unbearable. Her landlady urged her to go to the doctor because she looked very pale. Someone knew of a good doctor who was a master of seven languages so she paid him a visit. "You are a very sick girl"; he said to her. "You must give up work". "I can't, I do not have anybody to take care of me", she responded, and burst into tears. The doctor gave her a comforting hug and assured her he was going to handle this. He gave her some time off work and started her on a course of medication as he discovered she was very anaemic. This involved weekly injections at the back of the knees and arranged with Holden to relocate her to another job that did not require standing for long periods. This kind doctor was her saviour. She recovered quickly but she never understood what her affliction was or what medication was prescribed.

Katina's youngest sister, Dimitra arrived in Adelaide and moved in with her in a more spacious house in Sturt Street where they rented a room together. Katina had signed and accepted responsibility for her sister and was hoping that she would find employment very soon. Dimitra registered with the Unemployment Office and they immediately offered her work in a factory in Victoria. She was willing to accept it, but Katina firmly said no. This was too risky because her sister was only 18, not 21 as her falsified papers stated and with no language or contacts for support. Because she refused the job that was offered to her, Dimitra did not receive any unemployment benefits and so Katina had to support her for the 11 months that it took for her to find employment in Hills Industries.

With the two girls working now, it became easier to save the 242 Pounds required to bring their younger brother over. Once he arrived, he too was unemployed for three months and the girls had to support him. They lived all together for about two and a half years until Katina got married and rented a room at a nearby house in Sturt Street for three months. She and her husband then rented a room in Thebarton while her two siblings remained in the old rented residence.

When Katina became pregnant she stopped her full time employment to raise her family and look after her husband as her main priority. While the children were young, Katina supplemented the family income by doing 4-5 hours per day house cleaning, at a number of homes in Prospect at an hourly rate of 70 cents. When the children started school she would take them there and then go to her cleaning jobs, and be back home in time to welcome her children as they returned. As they grew older she was able to resume full time employment and took the opportunity to get a job as a domestic cleaner at the Memorial Hospital for two years. Later she worked at the Children's Hospital in a similar job. Katina worked from 1971 until 1992 when she reached retirement.

Katina spent most of her working life in Australia, moving from one rented single room to another. It wasn't until her children were growing up that they rented a whole flat. A whole flat to themselves! What a luxury that would have been. Seven years after coming to Australia, her dream to own her own house materialised.

Katina observes that one cannot help but notice the irony. What happened to the 'Promised Land' young Katina fantasised about as she looked at the map of Australia in her teen years? Katina however, never uttered a negative word about her adopted country.

The urge to visit Greece though was great, especially when Katina's parents were still alive. Financially this was not possible. Katina and her husband had to wait until their retirement, for their first pilgrimage. When they arrived there, she couldn't believe how everything had

changed. Things were much better, modern houses with all the comforts, mechanisation in the fields and people there had a lot of free time. Even Germans had invested in her village, building huge mansions, as holiday houses. The locals, mostly strangers to her, were polite but they thought she was a 'xeni' (foreigner), asking her where she came from, perhaps because her Greek speaking manner was somewhat hesitant as she did not want to accidentally throw English words in the course of her conversation. This she found rather insulting, because she considered herself to be a local by her birthright.

Five years later she went back again for a holiday which she enjoyed immensely. Greece she stated is her motherland but Australia is home, after all, this is where she has spent most of her life, this is where she has worked hard to earn her own home and build her family.