

**This is an interview with Michael Papazoglou on Wednesday 10 April 2013 at his holiday home in Moana. The interviewer is Helen Haltis and the interview is being conducted as part of the Greek Migrant Experience, Oral Histories project. An OEEGA initiative. It is funded by the Australian Government's "Your Community Heritage Program - Sharing Community Heritage Stories".**

**As indicated in the Oral History Handbook:**

**Punctuation: Square bracket [ ] indicate material in the transcript that does not occur on the original tape recording. Sentences that were left unfinished in the normal manner of conversation are shown ending in three dashes, - - -**

**Welcome Michael and thank you very much in agreeing to take part in this project.**

**Can we start by you giving us your full name for the recording.**

My name is Michael Papazoglou.

**And where were you born Michael?**

I was born in a small village of Glikokerasia in the Prefecture of Kozani in Greece.

**And when were you born?**

I was born on the 15th of February 1942.

**And your parents where were they born?**

Both of my parents were born in Asia Minor in the area of Pontos, they are both Pontian Greeks.

**We will start with your dad, exactly where was your dad born.**

My dad was born in a village in the area of Bathra. He was born in 1902 as far as they could tell because they didn't have the records with them when they came over to Greece.

**And let's talk a little bit about how your dad came to be in Kozani.**

With a lot of others, millions of Greeks that were living in Asia Minor for centuries, after the First World War there was a war between Greece and Turkey and in that upheaval most of the Greeks were sent away more or less by the Turks. A lot of them went into exile, a lot of them went into the hills as guerrilla fighters trying to save themselves and their families, and my father was one of those that went into the hills for a couple of years.

**As a young man?**

As a young man, he was with the guerrillas but he never took a rifle because being one of the youngest with the guerrillas and because they didn't have all that much guns and ammunition, they had a policy for every fighter there should be five people, that would sort of carry the stuff and look after other areas of the struggle. After a period of over two years hiding in the hills and in the mountains there was an agreement, and the war finished between Greece and Turkey, there was an agreement between the two governments that there should be an exchange of populations. My father got in the town of Samsunta together with his family and other extended family, his family being his mother and his sister and from Samsunta they got onto an American ship that brought them to Constantinople. Now there is an interesting story there. The port in Samsunta is not deep enough for the big ships to go to port so they had to be ferried by boat to the American ship that was waiting on anchor and they paid this Turkish fellow to take them across. It was eight of them, and they paid him whatever they paid him. When they were half way he said "you either give me a gold coin each, a gold sovereign for each person" which meant eight gold sovereigns "or I'll dump you in the sea". Apparently my grandmother had some gold coins hidden in the hem of her dress, so she paid them the eight sovereigns and they got onto the ship and she was left with only two gold sovereigns for the trip to come back to Greece. Now in Constantinople they stayed at the old army barracks for about forty days as my father was saying, where he got sick, he didn't know from what, but his mother got sick as well and she died. She is buried in Constantinople. After that they got onto a Greek ship and they came to Thessaloniki.

### **That was your father and ---**

It was my father and his sister and they disembarked in Thessaloniki, together with other relatives, extended family and other people from the same village and from the same areas. After Thessaloniki they went to this village in Kozani. The thing was that they were sent there because that's where the Turks that had left from Greece, in the exchange of the population, their houses that were empty and the properties that the Turks had. In the exchange process, the Greeks from Turkey had to take the properties from the Turks and the Turks from Greece had to take the property of the Greeks in Turkey. So that's why he ended up in the village of Glikokerasia in the Prefecture of Kozani.

### **Isn't it amazing.**

That is, in a nutshell, my father's story.

**How old was he by the time he reached Kozani.**

He was a 20 year old.

**A young man.**

A young man.

**Mum has a little bit of a different story.**

Mum's story is fairly different in the sense that, although [from] my father's village they were able to escape the Turks and run into the hills, my mother's village did not have, not all of it anyway, did not have that luck, the Turks got there, they rounded them up and they sent them into exile. Now apparently that was the policy of the Turkish government at the time. They gathered together a lot of Pontian Greeks and they sent them, with the army, they had the army taking them from one place to the other, inside Turkey. Now when they reached the first town that they took them, there were about three and a half thousand of them, and they kept walking right through eastern Turkey. They went into Syria, they went into Mesopotamia, and two and a half years later they ended up in Beirut, in present day Lebanon. Of course you have to remember all those areas were Turkish. So they were just taking them from one place to another. It was very hard because they could only take whatever they could carry with them and this thing lasting for years, I mean at the end there was nothing left, and on the road they used to beg, in different areas and different villages that they went through. Or if they stayed in one place more than say a week or two weeks they tried to get some sort of job that people can offer them --- just feed them, nothing else. There was no question of paying for the work. As my mother used to say it was a very difficult time, it wasn't unusual to sleep at night under open skies and wake up in the morning with about half a metre of snow on top of you. There was also the other menace that at night time where they would sort of stop, there were gangs of youths from the surrounding villages, from where ever they stayed, they used to run into camp and grab the girls. A lot of girls, she was saying, had vanished that way. A lot of people slept at night and didn't wake up in the morning. A lot of people fell down as they were walking and never stood up. To get the picture of the whole thing I think it is best to say this, that out of the three and a half thousand people that started that journey, two years later in Beirut reached only 600. They stayed in Beirut for about six months. There they had them in some sort of camp

but they were allowed to go out and see if they could find some sort of work for their feed, nothing else and my mother did go to a house and work there for about a month. The husband was Turkish Muslim, the wife was Greek from Athens and she was speaking Greek and so my mother could sort of understand what they wanted her to do. Among other things she did, she went to other houses as well. Six months after the exchange of the population was arranged between the two countries, a Greek ship took them to the port of Piraeus in Athens. All this time she had her father with her, there was the two of them plus the extended family and the other villagers. In Piraeus, they put them into quarantine for forty days. When I first heard the story I didn't know what quarantine was and my mother explained me and I asked "why". She didn't know. And to other people who I have asked, nobody knows why they put them in quarantine, but obviously the government, or the authorities had their reasons. After the quarantine they were told to go north where the places were empty where the Turks had left. So they ended up walking north. My grandfather died outside of Larissa in the town of Tyrnavos. They said he drank water from some spring that had poison or glass or something, but probably it was malaria. That was the thing later. Anyway my mother carried on and came to the village of Omali in the Prefecture of Kozani which is next to Glikokerasia where my father was. After a while, we are talking weeks now, these people that were there they were given houses, wherever they were available, but in order to get some land farm land, they only gave farm land to families. My father did not have a family, his sister had died as soon as they reached the village, so he was on his own and being on his own he would not be entitled to get any land. He was not the only one, other people were in the same boat. In order to get land they had to get married, so my father saw my mother somewhere in one of the neighbour's houses and asked this and that and they ended up getting married two or three days later in order to be able to get some land. And that was in early 1923 as far as I can remember, from what they said.

**Now going back to Pontos when your parents were there as young people, were they able to go to school and learn the Greek language?**

My mother was in an area where most of the villages were Greek and they spoke the Pontian dialect. My mother did not go to school at all, she was completely illiterate. Although there was school available she had the problem that when she was eight her mother died so she sort of looked after the family, and the other thing was that girls

were not supposed to need education in those days. She only spoke the Pontian dialect and she only learned Turkish when she married my father. Now my father's story is in this respect is a bit different. Where he was born most of the villages around, or let's say most of the population, was Turkish. The Greeks were a minority in that area, consequently they had lost their language. Now that happened probably generations ago. My father, they had a school at his village, he went first grade and when they started the second grade the Turks closed the school and they took the teacher away. So although he could write his name and he could basically recognise the writing, but his language skills in Greek were very limited. He was a Turkophone. A Τουρκόφωνος [Turkophone]. So when they came to Greece, in that village, most of them were from the same village from Pontos, and most of them spoke only Turkish, so my mother had to learn the Turkish language as a must, because everybody spoke it. [Also] any other girl that married, any local girl, a Greek girl from Greece, that married in that village and there were a couple that I knew, later in life, they all had to learn the language, it was one of those things, otherwise you could not get along. That's as far as that goes. The other thing that comes to mind is this, that, these people even though they were from small villages, especially my mother's area was from the high country, they were people who knew what they wanted. My uncle, my mother's brother went to school in Trapezounta , now he was going to be a teacher when he finished, he knew five languages apparently, Greek obviously, Turkish, English, French and Russian. He died when he was 23 from some sort of sickness. Now my father's family was rather well-to-do apparently, economically they were very well to do but they had the misfortune that my uncle, my father's elder brother Michael, whose name I have, died in Skidra, in the Balkan War. He was conscripted in the Turkish army. My grandfather was conscripted in the Turkish army but they wouldn't actually give them --- this was during the First World War, they weren't actually taking them to the front, they were made to work in road gangs and the conditions were that harsh that apparently about 90% of them perished. I know my grandfather perished. The only thing that we knew of from the time that he was conscripted, a letter that he sent to his wife, back in the village, asking her to pay whatever it takes to get him out of that. Apparently, if you paid enough you could get out, and my grandmother, she went and found some Turk somewhere and gave him whatever gold coins, sovereigns he asked for but my [grand]father never came back. So what happened, whether he just got the money and did nothing about it,

he couldn't do anything about it, it was too late, nobody knows. Yes their life was very hard.

**Did they have freedom to practice their Greek Orthodox religion?**

They were free to practice, yes they were free, as far as worshipping. They had the churches, the churches they never closed as far as I know from that side of things, yes. But the thing is whenever there was an upheaval or something, it was the done thing that the Turks would go to the Greek villages and kill and burn and plunder. That apparently had been going on for generations because as my father was saying, when they left, his village was 120 years old. They had come from another area because of whatever had happened, nobody knew from my father's side. Apparently the Turks had gone and burnt the village and killed a few and whoever escaped they left that area and went and established another village somewhere else. It always depended on who was the Sultan and how he viewed the Christians, but as far as my parents ever said anything, the church was never closed, they were always allowed to practice their religion. I want to quantify that by saying that in my father's village the liturgy was done in the Turkish language, we still have the letters of what you call it the Apostles, which is in Greek letters and Turkish words. That was how they kept their faith. They lost their language, they kept their faith, they had translated all the religious books in what they call the Karamanlidika, it was Greek letters and Turkish words. We still have a couple of books, my brother Paul has them.

**Now even though they were getting on quite well in Turkey, in Pontos but due to unforeseen circumstances, unfortunate circumstances, they found themselves in Greece. Now when they went to Greece, how did the Greeks in Greece see these people that were coming back.**

Well they did not like it. They did not want them, they used to say and that I heard in my time too, "I hope the boat that brought you over, should have sunk". They were different cultures, especially with people that did not speak the Greek language, and even the ones like my mother who did not speak Turkish at all, they spoke the Pontian dialect. It is a Greek language, but it is quite different to the spoken Greek language, so there was a lot of prejudice [in] the first years. It wasn't the done thing that a refugee, as our people were called, a refugee boy would marry a Greek girl, unless the girl was from a very poor family, or did not have a good reputation, or she was not that good looking that nobody wanted her. That carried on to the time that I can remember. Now I

am not saying the state did this, it was the people, what they did between themselves. As far as the state is concerned I think they did the best to their ability, because we have to remember that Greece was in the First World War, they had the war with Turkey, which they lost, and then they had one and a half million people come with nothing but what they wore on themselves, so they had to sort of look after them, and with all the shortcomings and what have you, I think, and my parents used to say, they did whatever they could, but things were tough.

**So your parents married and what did they do for a living?**

That is fairly obvious, they worked on the land. They gave them about 10 acres of land which, for the standards of the time, and the standards of Greece was a fair amount of land. One which a family was supposed to live and they started cultivating and they had a family, they had eight kids, two of them died in infancy, one died of polio, thirteen years of age, he was a bit older than me and five of us survived, four boys and one girl. They worked hard, that was one of the things I heard from people when I was growing up, they used to say that the way these πρόσφυγες, [refugees] these refugees worked the first years, it was unbelievable. But they had to because there was no other choice.

**They had nothing, they came with nothing.**

They had nothing they came with nothing. The state gave them the house, which was good, they gave them the land and I believe the first couple of years they gave them some seeds, otherwise they could not plough or sow.

**What do you remember of your childhood?**

My childhood, I vaguely remember the civil war which was a terrible thing, that came after World War Two. I remember they got us from the village and they took us to a town called Tsotyli and we stayed there for almost, if I remember correctly, a couple of years. That is where I went first grade school, and I finished it there so that was one year, and we had gone there earlier. I was too young, other kids used to go to school and I didn't, so I assume it was almost two years that we stayed in that town and it was all the villagers of the whole area were in that town. They did that in order to starve the guerrillas from supplies and apparently it worked.

**Who is 'they'? Who moved you?**

The government. The Greek government that took over when the Germans left and of course the Civil War was between the right wing and the left wing and that lasted from '45, '46 to '49. I remember the end bit of it, I remember that we went to Tsotyli, I remember when the night that they came and broke in, the guerrillas came and broke in and took our livestock. I suppose they needed it, because they were starving and I remember the night that the last battle was fought in Gramos. I remember distinctly the φωτοβολίδες [flares], the flares, I remember seeing them, because the mountain is not all that far, we could see. That was the last battle of the civil war.

**What did these guerrillas want. Why did we have the civil war?**

The civil war was the left wing wanted a democratic Greece without a king. The king had come back, the English had brought the king back, and they had installed a government who was a right winged and they used a lot of the people that, during the German occupation, were with the German army. Were actually fighting alongside the German army and those people then became the main stay of the Greek police and the Greek army. Well the left wing ..... the last people did not stand for it. One thing led to the other, I don't think it's appropriate to go into the detail of the thing.

**No it's not necessary.**

The fact is that there was a civil war and I think out of all the occupied countries in Europe, Greece was the only one that had the civil war, which is a pity and whatever destructions the Germans didn't do it was completed amongst the Greeks. And when I say destructions, I know my family story. As we said my parents came from Turkey in 1923, they started [to] establish themselves, they established their family and in 1944, whatever livestock, whatever provisions they had, in 1944 the German army, the last time they were in our area, they took everything. So the people were left with almost nothing, or were left with whatever they could hide. Alright, the Germans left and people started working again, my family the same thing, and they started establishing themselves again. My father had a few livestock, a few cows, a few sheep, a few goats and in 1948 the guerrillas took them. So he was left with nothing again. Now when we went, from Tsotyli, when we went back to our village all we had was a mule that the government had, not actually the government it was the United Nations Relief Agency, that gave [to] my father. He wasn't the only one, other people got stuff too, and the only thing alive that we had, was that mule and with the mule my father worked carrying

people up and down, carrying stuff and trying to feed his family until the next season when the crops would come up again. I remember coming back from school and if there was a slice of bread with a bit of sugar, that was a treat, mostly there was no sugar, and we had to eat just a slice of bread. These things I do remember, I experienced them myself. It was hard times, very hard times, financially people were ruined, because, well from 1940 to 1949 in our area at least there was always war. Always people being killed and properties getting confiscated and all that.

**Now you said the authorities moved you to a safe place, I've heard that they did that because they wanted to protect the children as well. Was there a danger of children being taken away.**

That is a story that I have heard too, because they say that the guerrillas used to take the children, which I know of cases where it happened, but all the people, and I know quite a few that were taken, were people that their families were with the guerrillas.

**That is interesting, isn't it.**

I don't know, and I've asked a lot of people here, if they can point out to somebody's kid that was taken and with the parents being in the village, or the town or whatever. Nobody has been able to tell me "I know that fellow that happened". They used to take their own kids, or if I was killed and my wife was killed or she was in prison and my brother was with the guerrillas in the mountains, he would come back and get my kids. That is how it happened. As far as I know and I beg to --- find somebody who can tell me that, you know, "no, no they took some other kids as well". I don't know, but the main reason that they took us to towns was to starve the guerrillas of supplies, because the guerrillas used to come to villages and grab whatever they could find. Because obviously they had to survive, that's part of the guerrilla warfare. That was happening even in the days of the Turkish occupation with the kleftes and the amartoloi and apparently that worked, it was a successful policy because at the end the government won the fight.

**So it was a very difficult period and when everything calmed down you went back to your village. Australian migration had started in the early '50s and you must have been aware, the whole family or people from your own villages, heard that Australia had opened its doors and they wanted workers. Did your family think of coming to Australia at that time?**

Yes, very interesting you should ask that. My father, because of all those things that happened around him and to him he wanted to leave that place, that area. For the first

time in 1948 he tried to come to Australia but nobody knew the reasons why that failed. Anyway after the civil war finished and what have you and migration started again this time on a bigger scale, my elder brother George applied to come to Australia and which he did, he left Greece in December of 1953 and he came to Australia in January of 1954. A few years later he nominated to bring the rest of the family, which is me, my younger brother Paul and my two parents. That was in about 1956, but then the Suez Canal closed and they had problems there and that stopped. But my father kept wanting to come, to leave Greece, so in 1958 again my brother nominated us through the Immigration Department and eventually we managed the four of us to come in September of 1959 to Australia.

**Your brother came across with the Australian Government's Assisted Passage, is that right?**

Yes he came with the Assisted Passage and they went to Bonegilla first, I don't know how long he stayed there. From there they sent them to some farms in I think Mildura way, grape picking or what have you and from there him and some other friends that he made, people that he came on the ship with, they came to Adelaide and he stayed there and that's where we ended up coming to Adelaide when we migrated to Australia.

**So he invites the family to come across, and he paid for your tickets to come across?**

No my brother did not pay, we paid, my father paid the fares. By that time we were financially a lot better of course and that was the reason that I personally did not want to come. But as a 17 year old my parents would not leave me behind. I begged them to leave me behind but that was to no avail so even though I did not want to come I ended up coming because the family wanted to come and I had no choice in the matter.

**Why didn't you want to come?**

I had a feeling that I'd do well there and there was no need for me to migrate. Of course talking with my father, his answer was, "you don't know, you don't remember, you were too young". I used to tell him "but that's happened, that's gone, that's in the past". "You don't know it might happen again. Get out of this country". He was fed up with it. They had difficult times. They were hard for them. I remember the things that I remember and they were hard, can you image having three or four kids and trying to raise them, must have been awful for them.

**You said earlier you had a sister as well, did she come with you to Australia?**

No my sister had married in 1952 and she stayed back. Her husband actually went to Belgium in 1955 or '56 and she went to Belgium as well a few years later, but she only stayed there for a little while, not even a year I don't think. When we were leaving for Australia, the arrangement was that they wanted to come back and stay in our place, in our village, in our house. So my sister came just before we left with her son and we left and a month later her husband came from Belgium too and they stayed there. They're still there with their family.

**So you came across with the ship, do you remember the name of the ship?**

Yes it was the ship Flaminia, it was an Italian ship, there were a lot of Italians. For me it was an interesting trip. Up to [Port] Aden I was having a fantastic time. It was beautiful. That was the life. And then, when we got into the Indian Ocean there was a bit of a weather and it affected me, I got sea sick, I could not eat much, and I practically suffered all the way to Fremantle. It was one of those things, everyone was telling me just try, force yourself to eat, but I just couldn't, and whatever I put down it was coming up. In Fremantle, when we got there I was happy to step on land again, I tell you. I will never forget that feeling. I was on solid ground. We went into a restaurant together with other people, and I ate there, I ate a lot and that lasted me until Melbourne. Yes that was interesting, I could not eat the food in the ship, not because the food was bad but because of the seasickness that I had.

**You did not want to come, you were coming because you had to come. Once you arrived in Fremantle and you saw Australia can you remember what you thought?**

Well, it's interesting you ask that. As we were walking in Fremantle, about ten or fifteen of us, I heard this voice and I looked up and I saw this kid, he was saying something in English, which I could not understand, but I saw a pile of papers in his hands, obviously the kid was selling papers. But he was bare foot, he had no shoes on, and I looked at him and being bare foot in Greece was because you didn't have money to buy shoes, so I thought, there must be poverty here too. That was my first impression of Australia which wasn't very good. And the other impression not the best one, was when I saw the houses, they all had tin roofs. That was something unbelievable too.

**Now in this ship because you were coming to Australia did they provide English lessons?**

Yes they did provide English lessons and I attended a few days until we reached [Port] Aden, after that I was so sick I just gave it up, I couldn't. I remember the teacher

running into me a couple of times, the chap that taught us English, and he asked me and I told him, he said "Ah that's an excuse, you can come". But I never did go.

**So from Fremantle, after that, you went to Port Melbourne.**

Yes.

**And who was there to greet you?**

My brother came, George, from Adelaide, with his car. So he picked us up and drove us to Adelaide.

**Driving from Melbourne to Adelaide, can you remember what were your thoughts?**

I was impressed with the flatness of the country and of course haven't seen anything like it --- I knew from school that Australia was a flat country but nothing like what I saw and let's face it even today you do that journey and there is nothing to see, it's not the best part of Australia but there it was.

**So you arrive in Adelaide, and where did you stay?**

We stayed up at Careys Gully up in the Adelaide Hills, with people that I knew from Greece and they were friends of my brother's and we rented there for a while, for a few months. I got a job in the market garden at Lenswood. I was getting seven pound a week as a 17-18 year old and then come the summer time, January or February, all the family went to Mildura for grape picking. Which was an interesting experience for us all, except George of course, he had done it before. The thing that I will never forget, it was the first or second afternoon that we were working and it was damn hot and in the afternoon, George called us, we stopped for a break. The farmer's wife came with a [pot of] boiling tea and some cups and she offered us to drink hot tea in the hot afternoon. I looked at her and said "what goes on". She reckons, "no this is good for you". I said "what in this weather in this heat hot tea?" He [my brother] reckons "drink it and you will realise how cool it is". "How can it be cool pe?" [mate] Anyway we drank it and, obviously yes it had a cooling effect. I must admit. We done it a few times, she brought it around, we used to drink it. I haven't done it since frankly, but yes it has a cooling effect on you, hot tea in a hot day.

**The pickers, when you were grape picking, where do you sleep, where do you live?**

Ah. He had some sheds which he had cleaned up and we slept there. The first night there was stuff that would not let us sleep and then the next day he came and sprayed it

with, I think they said Mortein, and after that it was better, it was OK. They were tin sheds.

**There were bugs everywhere in other words.**

Yes there were bugs everywhere.

**And how long was the grape picking season.**

I think we stayed there until early April.

**And then back to Adelaide?**

Then back to Adelaide, back to Careys Gully, we stayed there for a few weeks more and my brother George and my father they bought a house together in Torrensville and we moved all the family there. Sometime in May I believe.

**How did your parents cope with the change in culture, and more importantly, the lack of the English language.**

Well, my father had no problem with the English language, because he had the same problem with the Greek language. No, they coped well. You know there was the family, they used to be able to, after a while, get on the bus go to town and do those things. They used to be able to go to shops sometimes when they needed, but most of the time one of the kids would have been with them. I must say that both of them, my father died in '78, my mother in '83, so they roughly lived about 20 years here and both of them would say now we understand what life is meant to be like. Because my father worked in the E&WS most of the time, my mother did go up in the market gardens and worked weekends, and this and that, but mostly she didn't. They were content, they were happy, they didn't have the suffering and the problems that they had back home.

**You as a young man, did you start learning English?**

Yes, yes, that is interesting. Yes I started as soon as I could, I started going to evening migrant classes. I [was] determined that I would learn the language, because I had an experience in the ship. For the first time in my life there were people, human beings around me, they used to speak, and I could not understand. That was a new sensation for me, I never had that experience before, so there and then I sort of made the decision, that when I go I will learn the language to the extent that I would be able to have a conversation with anybody about anything. I tried very hard, I did not learn the language as easily as a lot of other people did. They learn by hearsay. I learned by

studying. I went to weekend migration classes for a long time, and I went to higher classes as it is. So I've tried to learn the language as much as possible, although apparently my accent is not the best, my brother George used to say "I don't understand how people understand you when you speak English". But there it is I think I have a fairly reasonable command of the language. I speak English as well as I speak Greek I think.

**Now, well you do have a good command of the English language, and you have done a variety of jobs as well haven't you.**

Yes. Different jobs, as I said I started in the market gardens, then I went grape picking, after that I got a job at a small factory on Anzac Highway, it was making automobile accessories, sun visors and things like that. I worked there for a couple of years, after that I went to another small factory at Torrensville, I think it was called ERG, that was making mainly steel door frames, and in 1963 I went and got a job at Chrysler at Keswick. I worked there for about three months and then they sent me up at the new plant at Tonsley Park, Chryslers, where I worked until 1966. 1966 is the year that I got married and after a while I left Chryslers and I bought a fish shop in the Arndale Shopping Centre together with my brother and somebody else. I had that for about twelve months, we sold that and I worked for a couple of years at the Phillips in Hendon, I was three shifts, that wasn't the best of times, working three shifts, it's not my cup of tea. I did that for a couple of years and then in '68 or '69 I got the job at the Continental Bakery which was in town, delivering bread to shops and houses. I did that for a couple of years and in that time I got my Real Estate salesman's licence and I started doing that job part time. After a while I quit the bakery and I started doing real estate full time which I did until 1981 or '82. After that I stopped the real estate because things were a bit squeezed and tight, I bought myself a cab and I drove for a while, for a few years, and then I bought another cab, we had drivers, then we bought a third one for my son Harry. We still have the cabs, I only have the plates now. The last time I drove a cab was in 1998, I think. After that I went back to real estate until my retirement when I was 65 and sort of stopped work. I am retired now, I am what you call a self funded retiree and life goes on, hopefully.

**You've done very well Michael. Let's go back now, you are in your early twenties, and mum says 'Michael, time to marry you off'. Tell us what happened. (laughter)**

Yes, I was early twenties, they tried to marry off and there were some girls here that we saw and what have you but nothing eventuated. One day I was writing a letter back to my sister in Greece in the village, I was the one that was doing the correspondence because both my parents were illiterate. My brother Paul he was hardly home, he usually worked in the country in those days so I was doing the correspondence. As I was writing the letter my mum says "tell your sister to find you a girl from Greece". So without thinking much about it I just wrote it down, as a joke, more or less. Anyway the letter went and another letter came and letters were exchanged, and after a while I don't know whether it was months or what, we get this letter and they tell me that they found me a girl. She is from that village and her name is such, and there is a photograph of a girl and they want a photograph of me. And I thought, oh gee, this is getting serious now. What the hell am I going to do? So I wrote back and said, look forget it, I am not up to it. They would not have a bar of it. They said look we gave our word to the people, you wrote to us to find you a girl, we found you a girl, it is a good girl, this and that. Anyway to cut a long story short, I went along with it, I sent a photograph, they sent another, we started corresponding with the girl's family and one thing led to the other and in 1966 Evanthia came to Australia, and we got married in June of that year and that was that, I suppose. We had two kids, Theoharis who was born in 1967 and Timoleon who was born in 1974. They were seven years apart, and there was a good reason for that because we thought we would stay with one kid, but then when Harry was growing up and his cousins and the people that he knew, our friends, all had brothers and sisters he started asking for either a brother, a sister or a dog. So we decided to give him a sister but it became a brother.

**Rather than a dog. (laughter)**

Rather than a dog, and that was how I got married with a photograph. I know it sounds strange and frankly my friends at the time when they heard that I was bringing a girl from Greece, they could not believe it because I wasn't supposed to be that kind of a person, but it did happen. It started as a joke as far as I was concerned, but I've got no regrets and I think my wife hasn't got any, at least she doesn't say as much. The thing to say about it is this, people that meet us today, years later, and we know each other two or three years, and know the information we got married with photograph, they could not believe it because we seem to be so suited to each other. So there it goes.

When my second grandson was about seven or eight years old, he asked his grandmother "how many times you saw grandpa and you married him", and what could she say, she said "I did not see him, we married with assistance of a photograph" and the kid looked at her bewildered. She said "we married with the internet", and he understood that. So now, since then, whenever the occasion arises, we say we married with the internet. The internet of the time. (laughter)

**Well your sister knew you, she knew her brother quite well and chose well for you.**

Yes, yes, I must admit, she did. (laughter) She did very well.

**Now have you been back to Kozani.**

Yes we went back to Kozani in 1977.

**Can you remember, how did you feel, going back to your village?**

Going back to Greece was exciting. I remember jumping on a cab at the airport and asking the driver to take us to a hotel somewhere in the centre of the town [Athens], and as he was driving, he turned the corner, onto the main road and I saw the Acropolis in front of me. Even today it gives me the shivers. It was unbelievable.

The village, when I met my wife's family, that was another, different kind of feeling. There were old people that they knew me for years, or I knew them. It was all exciting, when I went to the village I could not see enough of it, I could not take enough of it in me. It was all so wonderful.

**Did you feel you were going back home?**

I must say yes, even though the home, the actual home that I grew up wasn't there, because they had demolished it and built a new one, my sister and her husband and her family. But yes it felt like going home and even now when we go back and we have been back five times, it still feels home, but also coming back feels home as well.

**That first time you went, how long did you stay?**

We stayed three months, which is the normal thing for Greeks from Australia to do, I don't know why.

**When time came for you to leave and come back to Australia, what did you feel?**

Well that is an interesting point, I had done a thing that I left to maximise the time that I could stay in Greece, three months and I left it to the last day to leave. I had a problem

with the army, because I did not go to the Greek army and because I was in my thirties I could only stay three months, a day over and they could grab me and send me to the army. So I left to the last day, I thought I will leave on that day, but such is luck, we went to the airport in Athens, to leave at about 10 or 11 o'clock that evening, and wouldn't you know it, there was a strike in London and the Singapore airline would not come through until the next morning. So the next morning technically, I could be stopped from migrating, but the person who looked at our papers, he either didn't realise and didn't want to bother, or felt sorry for me or whatever, he let us go through. Yes it was coming home.

### **Both ways.**

Both ways it's coming home, but I do believe that coming home to Australia feels more like home.

### **When your children were growing up did you send them to Greek school?**

Yes we sent them both to Greek school, in fact with the first one, we did something most of us Greeks in Australia and I suppose other nationalities, thought they should do. Being a typical good Greek, I thought, the kid will learn English, no matter what, we are in Australia, so our duty is to teach him the Greek language and you can do that before he goes to school. So we kept speaking to him the Greek and he knew the Greek language well, fairly well. When he went to school he could hardly speak any English. But what the heck he [will] learn the language no problems, and we didn't think much of it, until on the second grade I went one day to pick him up, which mostly I did, because I was doing real estate at the time and I had the time, and he got into the car and as we were coming home he said to me in English "Dad I wish I was an English kid" and I looked at him I sort of laughed and said "why?" "So I can understand what the teacher is talking about". At that moment it hit me, the mistake that we did by not teaching the kid both languages. Harry finished high school, he did not go any further and school was hard for him, and I do believe because of the fact that the first couple of years at school he was left behind, because of the language problem. That kept him back and after that with my wife, we decided that with Timmy, and with Harry I will speak to the kids in English and she will speak in Greek. Both kids speak reasonably good Greek, Timmy also did his Matric [Matriculation/Year 12] in Greek and that's how he got into Uni [university]. He writes reasonably well and he can read reasonably

well, although he could have done better. But as far as the grandkids are concerned, with Harry's kids, being of mixed marriage, their mother is Italian, they did not learn any other language, either Greek or Italian. They only speak English. But I think that was a mistake that a lot of Greeks did that I know of, they put too much emphasis on the kids learning the Greek language, the emphasis should have been on learning both languages. So when the kid went to school, he wasn't behind the eight ball.

**How important was it for you, for your children to learn the Greek language?**

We felt it our duty and I think, I still think it's our duty, to teach our kids our language, our customs, our heritage and let's face it, our heritage. I mean I've got nothing against anybody else, and everybody should be proud of their heritage, but our heritage is a bit more than the average heritages of most people, so there is no reason why our kids should not speak the language, especially they should know our heritage, their heritage for that matter.

**Thank you very much Michael it has been a very very informative, a very interesting interview, is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't covered.**

Not that I can think of and I must thank you for giving me this opportunity to say my story. I don't know how good it was. In a nut shell that's, I don't think there was anything of importance that I could add. I mean, that about covers it I think.

**Again thank you very much.**

Thank you.