

This is an interview with Peter Privopoulos on Sunday 21st of April 2013, at his home in Myrtle Bank. The interviewer is Helen Haltis and the interview is being conducted as part of the Greek Migration 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 Peter and thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed.

My pleasure.

May we start with you stating your full name please for the recording.

Peter Privopoulos, known as Panteli in Greek.

And where were you born Peter?

I was born in Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople] which is now Istanbul in 1947 in a suburb called Galata which is still the Greek name, which obviously they had milk suppliers there - very very interesting place.

And your parents, did they always live in Constantinople?

They did, and we go back two or three generations, that we can trace back and they all lived in Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople]. They go back to the Roman Empire if you want to call it that, when Constantine the Great took over, what is now Istanbul and we were always referred to as Ρωμιοί [Rhomioi], 'of Rome' of allegiance to Rome. So the word Ρωμιοί [Rhomioi] is still around but I think it's loosely connected with all Greeks, but Ρωμιοί [Rhomioi] was 'of Rome'.

That's interesting isn't it?

Yeh.

Do you remember much about your childhood in Constantinople?

I do, I do. There were some very happy times and there were some extremely sad times that I don't really want to think about sometimes.

No that's fine. Now your parents, what work did they do?

My father was a chauffeur and right-hand-man to the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church. The Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate] as you would have it, has never shifted

because we still claim Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople] to be there and one day the story goes that we hope to get it back. I doubt it but the head of the Greek Orthodox Church around the world is the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate] in Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople], Istanbul. So he worked there as a chauffeur and a right-hand-man to the Patriarch, he loved his work because he met dignitaries from around the world, he received them, he drove them around, chauffeured them to places like Αγία Σοφία [Hagia Sophia] and many other ancient churches, so he loved his work and our house was actually at the end of the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate]. It belonged to the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate]. It was a two storey place with two garages underneath, unlike what we saw when we came to Australia. He used to drive a nice big long black Cadillac, he wore a uniform and he was looked up to.

What a life.

It was a good life. We were very well-off.

Very well. What about mum? What did she do?

Mum was a home duties. She didn't have to work. She attended to everyday duties of the home and we also had γιαγιά [grandmother]. My grandmother lived with us, so it was mainly home duties. She did voluntary work for the church and committees and stuff like that and I think that was the extent of it. It wasn't a money making venture. Just being involved.

And did you go to school Peter?

I went to a school called Tsouvali. I don't know what it means but it was a Greek school. Greeks went to Greek schools, however it was a law that we must have Turkish lessons. So a Turkish teacher would come in, I think it was two or three times a week to give us Turkish lessons. My Greek, my Turkish rather wasn't the best then because we spoke Greek at home. We didn't really assimilate with the Turks. We were different to them, even though our neighbours were nice people, they looked up to us, I never really had any relationship with the Greek [Turkish] kids living around us.

The Greek kids?

Sorry I beg your pardon, with the Turkish kids, it was the few Greek kids that we stuck together because we felt more comfortable together. The Turkish kids were a bit nasty to us, they called us names and all sorts of things, so we couldn't really mix with them.

But having said that, my parents were very friendly with the immediate neighbours. We had running water, the houses surrounding us didn't, because they were all Turkish occupied, and mum used to let them take water from our taps near the garage and we'd save them walking a couple of kilometres away to get it from the public tap, if you like, or public fountain. So we were very well liked and my parents were very, how can I put it, very conscious of that and they wanted the Turks to be our friends in the immediate neighbourhood, which paid off. Because when in 1956 the Turks, the riots began and smashing all the houses and all the establishments owned by the Greeks, the Turks in our neighbourhood stood up to the mob and they said "there's no Greeks here, move on" and "go and find them and do whatever you have to but leave us alone, there's no Greeks here".

It sounds like an idyllic lifestyle.

When you're eight years old, it's scary, it's scary when you wake up in the morning and you see in your downstairs foyer, the porch of our house, you see soldiers with machine guns and you see several armoured vehicles along the street. It's a very frightening experience and not only for a young child, but also [for] our parents. They didn't know what was going to happen the next day, because rumour had it they were going to come and slaughter the Greeks the next day, after demolishing their houses and every possession they had.

What brought this on?

This was the result of the Turkish situation where the Turks in Cyprus wanted union with the Turkish Government and the Greeks were going for independence for Cyprus. It was very strong [probable] that they would get independence and the Turks thought that they would be eventually thrown out because the Greeks, who were the dominant people in Cyprus, would take over, there'd be no place for the Turks. They couldn't do anything in Cyprus because they were outnumbered by the Greeks so they took it out on the Greeks in Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople], in Istanbul, who were the innocent party. If it wasn't for the then Prime Minister of Turkey, Menderes, I'm sure they would have slaughtered Greeks the next day. In fact, years later Mr Menderes was put on trial because he defended the Greeks in Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople] and he got hung for it.

Isn't it incredible? I said that it was an idyllic lifestyle, I meant prior to all this trouble.

We were very well off and most of the Greeks in Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople] were well off. We were envied by the Turks. All the big stores like your David Jones and that, were owned by Greeks and the Turks were our subordinates, they carried stuff for us on their backs, so we were looked up to and we were envied of course, because the Greeks were very progressive. The Turkish people were generally backward. We had better education than they did and I think it was recently, that the Turkish Prime Minister said the Turks made a big mistake in getting rid of all the Greeks out of Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople] Istanbul, because we were forward thinking, we were great merchants, and we contained the wealth of Constantinople.

You said that your father was a right-hand-man to the Patriarch. Does that mean he did a lot of travel with the Patriarch as well?

Mainly internally, throughout Turkey if you like. They used to try and keep the old cathedrals open and there's some magnificent cathedrals in Turkey. Cathedrals that even Greece hasn't got up till today. And they would go and perform a liturgy at these places and the crowd would follow them. My father also used to welcome dignitaries coming from all over the world. He used to go there with this big white 1956 Cadillac, stretched, and dressed in the uniform and he'd pick up people like Aristotle Onassis who would pull up with his yacht. Spyros Skouras I think his name is, from 20th Century Fox, the President, they made several visits to the Patriarch. So it was my father's job to pick them up, show them around, escort them to their dinner, so yeh he had a very good lifestyle and he loved his position.

That's wonderful isn't it. Did he learn any English?

My father learnt English, he was self taught. He learnt English before we came to Australia. He had a lot of contacts with the Archbishop of America, the Archbishop of Australia, they knew him very well personally, and they brought him books and they taught him English, so when we came to Australia, he could get by. His English wasn't fluent, he spoke it with an accent but he could certainly get by and that helped him get a job.

Well what happened that made your father decide that "we had to get out"?

Mum and dad would go walking, window shopping if you like, they'd walk down also to my father's, my grandfather's tailor shop and he'd be working late at night and they'd sit there and talk and order some food in. As they were walking, on several occasions,

the Turks walking passed commented that they'd clean up my father, they'd slaughter him before they got the Patriarch. "Who does this man think he is?" Because he held a good position, so mother with four children was on dad's back " Γιάβνη [John], when are we leaving here? We have to leave, we can't put up with this you know, it's not safe for our children. What future have they got?" So my father spoke to his mother on several occasions about leaving and γιαγιά [grandmother] then turned around and said "well Γιάβνη [John] you know you've got a first cousin living in Australia in a place called Adelaide". We never heard of it, that was the end of the world. "We may get him to sponsor you. Why don't you look him up?" So through several efforts with other people living in Greece, we managed to track down Uncle John and he managed to sponsor us. We came to Australia, which was a complete turnaround in our lifestyle. Where mum and dad would go to nice restaurants and function centres and be invited to special events, we came to Adelaide where there was not a two-storey house in place. There wasn't a refrigerator that we knew of. [In Constantinople] we had the latest furniture, hand-carved furniture if you like, we had refrigeration and we came to Adelaide, stayed with our aunty and mum said "oh we bought some stuff where's the fridge?" "yeh, yeh we've got a fridge" and it turned out to be an ice box in the laundry, but it wasn't cold, we had to wait for the ice man to come a few days later, so that was certainly an experience. My father's comments then were "even our slaves" (and we didn't have slaves) but "even slaves where we come from don't have furniture like this." Iron roofs you wouldn't have a shed with an iron roof yet here we are, all the houses had iron roofs, styled completely different than the style of the house that we had. We told people we had a two-storey house with garages underneath. They wouldn't believe us. They said "two-storey house? Why would you need a two-storey house?"

What year are we talking about here?

We're talking late 1956, I think it was November '56, I remember that because my mother used to say we came on her name day and her name is Ελευθερία [Eleftheria] so I believe it was November 1956. A whole new world. Completely different.

It would have been. As a little eight year old, when dad said 'we're leaving, we're going to a place called Australia', do you remember what you thought?

I do. It was a little bit frightening because I had friends, I had my school, we had a lovely house, we had the church, the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate], the head of the church of the Greek Orthodox faith, it was all there, we had it all. We had our grandfathers,

grandmothers, aunties and friends and here we are, we're going somewhere to an uncle that nobody knew, my father didn't even know. We didn't know the language, but although my father knew enough to get by, we thought where are we going? But my mother's thoughts were "well Γιάννη [John] it's a Christian country so we're not going to be persecuted by the Muslims", because they were pretty bad. What the Turks would do is, as kids would go to school, they'd gang up on the young Greek kids, they would rip up their books, they'd throw the bags away, get beat up and sent back home. You can only put up with that for so long. But I remember my great-grandmother saying, when she was younger and she was going to church, the little Turkish kids would surround her, make signs of the cross all around her on the footpath to make her step on the holy cross and her comments were "I will step on the cross but be it on your head". So it goes right back, the history goes right back, that we never really assimilated with the Turks. They were always against us and when you see your churches knocked down, it leaves a nasty taste in your mouth, you know that your generation, or your kids' generations are not going to be any better. So it was a big decision, but we made it.

You were ready to leave Constantinople for Australia, and you flew to Australia.

We had a holiday home and our own home was owned --- it was a part of my father's package with the Patriarch, but we had a home. We had quite a bit of money, of assets if you like, and I remember dad saying, "well we're gonna go to this new country, yes it's a Christian country, but we're gonna go there and have nothing, just be prepared". Because our airfares, and we didn't get any assisted passage here, our airfares, it was mum dad and four kids, that took up everything. The Turkish pound was worth nothing here, maybe a cent. So it was a big risk to give up everything to come somewhere unknown.

In an earlier interview that we had, the initial interview, you said that on one occasion your mother was sewing the Turkish flag.

That was in '56 again when, with the Turkish riots in Cyprus and what have you, with the move for independence. The Turks took it out on us, on the Greeks and mum and grandma, *γιαγιά*, said we better do something to let them know we're Turks here, we're not Greeks because they would target us. We were the only Greek house in this cul-de-sac, if you like, that we lived. So they decided to find some red material and they sketched out a Turkish flag and I remember we hung it out of the window so the Turks

would leave us alone. I've also got memories that both my brother and I had a terrible cough, it may have been whooping cough or what have you and as the mobs were passing our house, mum and γιαγιά [grandmother] would put their hands over our mouths so we won't be heard because all our lights were out and we didn't want to give the impression that people were living there. Horrible things when you think about it.

It was wasn't it. So you leave Constantinople and this magnificent life up until the trouble with the Turks, you arrive in Adelaide, can you remember what you thought as soon as you came into Adelaide?

Well we pulled up at what is now the Casino, the railway station there, caught a cab to a place called Rosewater. We thought this is an empty place, we didn't have the people that we ---, where we came from, we were looking around for people, yet they had nice houses if you like, with verandas which were strange to us, we'd never seen houses with verandas and we were told by uncle before we came out, that all the houses here were surrounded with gardens. Well it wasn't quite that way. Especially at Rosewater where we lived. But it was a quiet place. People left us alone. That's what we liked about it, the tranquillity of it. And in those days you didn't have a quarter of the traffic that you have on the road. The peacefulness was the place and mum was happy that we were not being persecuted, we were left alone. Only to find out when we went to school that the average Australian didn't know much about migrants. Whether you're Greek or Italian or anything else. They were curious and somewhat, not afraid of us, but they didn't know how to take us and that was the strangest part.

As a little eight year old, you had to go to school obviously when you came to Australia, with no English.

I spoke very, very little English and picked up a few words from dad like a 'hello', 'come here', 'goodbye' and that was about the extent of it. We went to school in Rosewater with a young cousin, with two young cousins, boy and a girl and they were our mentors if you like. They spoke English, they were very very young, they were probably six or so, but we walked with them to the school. The teachers couldn't understand us and we couldn't understand the teachers. They put me a year back because they thought I'd be better off catching up in a lower class. The problem was that I became bored because I was in grade 4 in Istanbul and I was here in grade 3. Everything was so easy for me as far as maths was concerned and I didn't really understand the English language, so it was very difficult. Mind you within six months I

managed to speak English pretty well and I made a few Australian friends, but they were very cautious about us. They didn't know how to take us and of course when you go in with thick continental sliced bread sandwiches and they've got the nice sliced bread - they stood around and watched us. I remember that I went to school, I didn't have a proper school bag and mum and dad of course couldn't afford to buy us any, so we had one of the travelling bags, the smaller one and we had my lunch, my brother's and my sister's lunch in there and I think a raincoat or something. Here I was, going to school as if I was travelling overseas. It wasn't until we went and shifted to the city area that one of the teachers there saw this big bag that I was carrying and there were bags left in the racks out in the hallway and nobody had claimed these bags. There's two or three of them there and they said "well hang on a minute, we've got some bags here, who can we give these to?" I felt very embarrassed, I knew what she was getting at and she gave me one of these bags that you can stretch over your back, it had these straps over your shoulder, so the next day I was an Australian.

With a backpack.

With a backpack. Oh it was such a change.

So you finished, you went to school, you went through high school.

Adelaide High School, yes I finished high school. I didn't progress after that because my father had six children. Now he was the only wage earner, mum didn't work, and it was a burden on my dad so I went out and got an office job. I wasn't allowed to go out and get a factory job, no, I got an office job. And then I progressed from there. I went to a better position in a rubber company, then became an inspector, after that I did some courses and I became an estimator in an opposition company called Thyer rubber. So I progressed slowly, to the point where I saved enough money - I was married then, with two children - and decided to go into business and I've never looked back. It's been really good. We had a variety of businesses.

You said also that you went into the army.

This was during the Vietnam war. I was afraid to go to Vietnam. Dad said why don't we send you to Greece? We had some distant uncles, but it wasn't for me. So I did the Army Reserve thing for four years, so I got out of going to Vietnam. It was a great experience. It made me grow up. It made me appreciate other people around me and

how they lived. I was taught discipline in a different way, where I became more self supporting and didn't have to rely on other people and it stayed with me 'til today.

Let's go back to your dad. He was a chauffeur of the Patriarch in Constantinople. What work did he do when he came here?

In '56 a lot of people were out of work. The economy was bad so you couldn't get a job, only if you had contacts. Through the Greek community there was a gentleman called Con Liaskos. Now Con Liaskos was quite wealthy, he owned a group of shops in Hindley Street, he also had a butcher shop there and a chicken processing factory at the back of that. Now he needed a delivery driver, so dad was told of this and he went and met up with him and that was the best he could do to what he was qualified to do, which was driving. So he delivered chickens in the metropolitan area. He got to know a lot about the poultry industry, eventually he left that position and he went to an opposition company which was a lot bigger and became a production manager. He moved from that a few years later to a position at SA Rubber Mills then, and he became a production manager there. He used to work long hours, he used to work something like 12 hours, seven days a week. The money was great and lucky mother was tolerant, but it wasn't the job that he had back in Constantinople.

Nothing like it.

Nothing like it at all.

What did mum do?

Mum was basically a housewife because we came over, there were four kids, she had two more children, so six kids kept her busy. We were here for two years and we saved as much as we could to bring grandmother over. Grandmother was the only other close relation we had. She always lived with us and to bring her out, it cost quite a bit in those days. So father took on a part-time position with Mr Con Liaskos again, who had property in Cowandilla, he was developing a shopping centre there, and he was also expanding in Hindley Street, what later became the ice arena in Hindley Street. So they were making concrete bricks in Cowandilla which was awfully hot and there wasn't too much around there, so the money there that we made all stacking bricks and what have you, was enough to bring grandmother over and then we stopped that, once grandmother was here. Mind you, when grandmother came she got a job, she paid back mum and dad for the fare. She became a cleaner for Con Liaskos initially and then later

on because she was a teacher and she was a qualified chef, she got a position as a chef in the Riverland where young girls used to go and pick fruit. So they used to love γιαγιά [grandmother], she used to look after them very well and they used to come down from Berri to see her. She was a very likeable lady and she worked for many years until she got the pension and then of course she retired.

With dad's, as we said at a previous time, that he was with the Patriarch, did he get involved with the Greek church here in Adelaide?

He did indeed. He knew the Archbishop of Australia and we were talking to him on a regular basis, when he came to Adelaide a couple of times. There was the only one and only church in Franklin Street in those days. My dad expressed to him the need for a second and a third Greek church. Well, there were plans to open up a church in Norwood, which they did later and another one in Unley. The timing was great because he gave my father the ok to establish the church in Thebarton, which has the greater concentration of Greeks in South Australia, but what he had to do was go around to all the Greek homes and collect signatures to prove that there was a need. Once he did that the go ahead was there but the money wasn't. So they had to find a way to get the funds together to build Saint George. Initially Saint George was established on South Road in an Anglican Church where they paid so much to open it up on a Sunday, to have a service. Everybody brought their icons and we made candles at home 'til such time there was enough money to put a deposit on a property in Rose Street, which is the present area for Saint George. Dad put his house down as the guarantee for the loan to put a tin shed and later on of course they built a proper brick building, but the initial Saint George was only a tin shed.

Goodness me. Now where did the name Saint George come from?

Now that's an interesting one Helen, because my father wanted to call it Saint George because of the association with the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate], which is called Saint George. Now they went to rich people like Mr Gratzis and Mrs Cacas and people like that and asked for money to establish this church and Mrs Cacas was the one who said "look I will give x amount of dollars if you call it after my [late] husband" and he was George. So my father rubbed his hands and said "here we are, it's going to be Saint George and we've got somebody to sponsor it".

For two reasons.

For two reasons.

Now your dad continued right up to the end to be heavily involved in the church.

He was 'til such time that it was time to build the stone building of Saint George, there was conflict within - I beg your pardon, the people running the church - the committee fell out and my father tendered his resignation because he didn't, he was ashamed to where it was going. They reformed and built the church and it went on, but then my father moved from Thebarton, as all the kids left home, and they went to live at Noarlunga. Of course there was a church there, early beginnings, and he became the president there and he stayed there. He brought it to a different level I suppose. They could live down the road from the church and mum was happy and my dad was also a chanter as well, so they relied on him to go there every Sunday.

So did he do chanting at Saint George as well as Noarlunga?

He did, he did indeed. He used to love his chanting, yes.

When they, you, the whole family, originally came here, did you come with the intention of staying in Adelaide or going back?

No, my father wanted to come to this new frontier, if you like, Australia that we didn't know too much about, but he was offered a place in the Archdiocese of Athens. The Greek economy was very bad then, but he said well "we'll going to Australia for 10 years, see how we go, build up some assets and then we'll go and live in Greece". Turkey never came into the thinking because Greece and Turkey weren't too far away and you could visit the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate] and the Patriarch, but there was no life there for us. So we weren't going to go back to an unsecure future, but as time went on I remember mum saying "Γιάννη [John] when are we going to go, the kids are growing up now. You know if we don't move now, we're never going to move because the kids are going to start having girlfriends and relationships and marriages and you better think quick what we're going to do." As time went on, dad's fortunes got better and better and it was too hard to uproot and leave and of course the kids started growing up. I was the eldest one and got married first and followed by my sister, my eldest sister and then it just became too late and mind you we started liking Australia by then. I didn't like Australia 'til I was about 19 or 20.

Why?

I think we were spoilt in Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople]. We didn't have the luxuries [here], I mean, you couldn't go to a Greek cinema [here], whereas in Turkey, as bad as it was, we had our Greek cinemas, we had our Greek restaurants, we had our function centres. Even though in the '60s a lot of Greeks came out from Greece and slowly they started the pictures once a week at the Thebarton theatre and other places, there were no Greek restaurants. It was a long time before we got our food that we were used to, even Greek coffee, when we came to Australia in '56 it wasn't available. We all love our coffee and if we can't get our coffee, now you can imagine what it was like and there were other foods, foods like, even eggplants. Eggplant wasn't around, now it is, but we didn't feel comfortable. But as time went on things got better and better here and of course now we wouldn't think of going back unless it's a holiday. We've got everything we need here.

Did your mum and dad ever go back to Constantinople?

They did, in fact I think the first time they went back is when I and my wife were going and we were going to America. We were travelling around the world and we were going to go to Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople] and they said "Look we'd love to go as well", so we went together. That was an experience for dad because they expected it to be exactly as it was. Now even in the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate], the Patriarch had died, a lot of the clergy had left and there was, I remember there was one priest or bishop. We went inside the offices - he [my father] wanted to meet some of his friends, of course they weren't there - but there was this bishop called Father Γερμανός, meaning Father German if you like. I don't know how the name came about. And this Father Γερμανός was a red head and he was a very tall man and there he was grey as, short, but he remembered my father and they had a great conversation about the old times and what happened to who, but it had changed dramatically, sad, very sad.

So dad wouldn't have been happy, seeing the changes.

No he wasn't happy. We also walked around to where my grandfather's shop was and that wasn't there anymore. We walked past aunties' houses and all our relations, and they were all gone, there was nobody there. Very distant people that they knew, one or two that they said hello to, but we had no family, no ties, there was nothing there, it was like going back to a strange country.

It would have been very sad for your parents.

It was, even though they went back another time, because they were visiting Greece, they thought "we'll go over there", they wish they never went.

They wanted the memories that they had.

And they weren't there.

They weren't there.

Everybody had passed away, and a lot of the Greeks had left. I think when we went there, there were maybe 3,000 Greeks left, from something like half a million Greeks, and I think even now there's only a thousand, just under a thousand. But the interesting part now is that a lot of the Greeks from Greece, they're going to Κωνσταντινούπολη [Constantinople] because there's more job opportunities there.

That's interesting isn't it?

Isn't it? A complete turnaround.

What about you? Do you remember how you felt when you went back for the first time?

I didn't know what to expect. The first thing I wanted to see was our house and I couldn't wait. We were on a tour, a bus tour from Greece to Istanbul and there was very limited time to do anything, so as people were looking through the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate], I jumped the fence and, because our house was adjoining to the end of the Πατριαρχείο [Patriarchate] and [I] looked at our house and I came back and I said, "Oh mum the house looks exactly the same" and she was in tears, "Where's our house, where, how can I go?" She didn't have time to go because the bus was going to leave. We were going to go back for Greece, so she missed out on seeing our house.

What a shame.

It was, that was sad.

Did you feel though, that you were going back home when you were going to Constantinople?

In some ways yes, but I was very cautious [as to] what I'd find because I knew things were going bad for a long long time. By this time we hadn't been here, must be 20 years, so I knew there'd be some huge changes and I wouldn't know my friends, if they were even there. It was very very sad. As a part of this tour we went to a church called Αγία Βλαχέρνα [Hagia Vlaherna]. Αγία Βλαχέρνα [Hagia Vlaherna] was a very interesting place, that's where they sang the Τη Υπερμάχω [Te Υpermahō] which was

the song or chant, when the Turks were invading Constantinople and they all huddled around this church and they sang this. Rumour has it that all of a sudden the seas rose and there was a big hurricane and the Turkish ships were turned around and went back. A fantastic history of this church, in fact I remember distinctively, the holy water was like in a - imagine a hand basin with little crucibles in there - and holy water was poured into five or six little crucibles and you had to drink out of it and pray that way. Now this was there for many years and when the Turks in '56 arose or the mob if you like, they smashed all the churches, they smashed this solid marble hand basin if you want to call it that. My uncle who was a specialist in marble, donated his efforts and he actually replaced it and it was interesting for me to go back and see a brand new one that uncle had made. Little things like that and also the bus tour people, mainly Greeks, stood in this church which was damaged and they chanted the Τη Υπερμάχῳ [Te Ypermaho] and I don't think there was an eye that was dry in the place. Up until today, when I talk about it my hair stands up, very, very touching.

I want to go back to your school years here in Australia, when you went to school you said there were a few Greek children in there. Did you mix with the other Greek children here?

I was very lucky to have made good friends, lifelong friends, people like Luke Constantine and so forth. We grew up like brothers, we were very close, but the interesting part was, and I remember Luke - and I'm dobbing him in now - we were at assembly one day - and he couldn't assimilate - and we had to sing God Save the Queen. I was happily chanting away God Save the Queen, and he kicked me and says "don't, don't sing this", "why?" "you're not Australian". And we had a bit of a talk about it afterwards, but it's interesting, that thought is in my mind up until today. He must have felt bad about being here, he must have thought, it was uncomfortable for him. But now Luke is a completely different person. I don't think Luke even goes to Greek Orthodox church. His wife's name is Hunter and not Constantine, so you can see how things have turned around. I don't think his kids speak Greek. So what a turnaround over time.

It is isn't it? Did you go to Greek school here?

Only for a short period of time. I think the standard of Greek that I left in Grade 4 in Constantinople was a lot higher than the Greek they were teaching here, and I only

went for a couple of months and I told my parents I didn't want to go. My brothers and sisters went for a little while longer but no, I didn't feel comfortable.

Because your family came from Constantinople which was under Turkish rule, how did the Greeks in Australia treat you?

That was an interesting one, because, we came with nice clothes if you like, nice shoes. When we came here I think my father brought his cousin a Rolex watch and things of that nature and the attitude immediately was "Well who do they think they are?" "What are they doing here if they are so well off?" It wasn't that we said that we were well off, we spoke a little bit different, maybe clearer Greek than the Greeks spoke here. I don't think the Greeks that were already here were the educated Greeks. My father had a problem making friends, even though we were friendly with them, he couldn't have a heart to heart conversation with some of the neighbours. Even though he recruited them to build this church and they had things in common, he tended to associate more within the clergy. Maybe he felt more comfortable about it because of Constantinople, his job there and what have you. He did make friends, but he always said that the Greeks here are different to the Greeks that were back home. I think he was saying that in a nice way, but they were different. Mum and dad didn't have a lot in common with the Greeks that were here. Even my uncle, he was brought up in Greece, his wife was brought up in Macedonia - I think there was some underlying resentment there. Even though they were very nice people, especially my uncle, very nice man, so it took a while but they did make friends.

Why resentment?

We were different. If you go back to the Greek history, Constantinople was the centre of learning, we had magnificent colleges, the centre of education, the Greek, whoever wanted to be a priest would come over to Constantinople on the Island of Halki and study there. So we perhaps were of a higher standard of education and you can understand the resentment. When my father talked about his position, what he used to do, the people that he met, like Onassis like all these other people, their jaws dropped. They only heard of people like that and maybe they didn't feel too comfortable with my father because he had higher standards perhaps. He had a good education and all our family did. Those that worked in the merchant situation or importers were educated, they were teachers, university lecturers, so, we had to learn common Greek.

Even now are you classified as a Greek amongst the Greeks here in Adelaide?

Oh I am, there's a joke, it's a joke every now and then "oh and where are you from?" "Constantinople, Istanbul", "*είσαι Τούρκος;*" "Are you Turkish? Oh you must be Turkish". My own brother-in-law calls me a Turk but it is in jest. My friends are Greek, I feel like I'm very very Greek. I don't consider myself any different to any other Greek in Adelaide because I suppose we grew up as friends, lifelong friends that we meet every now and then, but no I'm very much a Greek. And I consider now Australia my home of course, but my second home I consider Greece.

Greece?

Not Istanbul.

That's interesting.

In fact I just bought a holiday home in Greece because I love the culture, I love my Greek food, the religion of course and I get all of that in Greece which I don't get in Istanbul.

Now as we said, dad was heavily involved in the church. Did you get involved in the church at all?

I did indeed, under a grant - first of all I was in a club called AHEPA [Australasian Hellenic Educational Progressive Association] and in later years, just trying to think what it was called in earlier, no it passed me, I'll come back to that. I was in a Greek club, it was a youth club called GOYA [Greek Orthodox Youth of Australia]. The Archbishop then of Australia [America] became the Archbishop of Australia. The Archbishop of America sorry became Archbishop of Australia and GOYA was a Greek thing over there which was a Greek Orthodox Youth of America and when he came here he established a Greek Orthodox Youth of Australia. As part of that, it was mainly Greek kids to meet other Greek kids, I suppose later on to marry into the Greek. We had a lot of fun, we used to have a lot of excursions and car rallies and what have you. It was a great experience. Later on after I got married and had a couple of kids there was a position in Saint George to run a youth club, to set up a youth club, and as a youth worker. Well I applied for that through a Government grant and got it, in line with somebody else, a Matthew Cosmos I think his name was, so we both got this position. There was good money there. It was a good part time income. It was meeting up with the next generation of youngsters. We told them what we used to do when we established a youth club and that was very, very interesting because I could see these

young kids growing up, more or less following in our footsteps. That went on for about two or three years, but in the early days of Saint George we became, what we call, *παπαδάκια*, altar boys, and friends of mine, George Portokalas, George Peters now, we talk about it very often and what the old days brought and how interesting they were. I was always associated with Saint George in particular. Yes and of course some of the other youths clubs like Unley and Norwood and all those.

Tell me, have you ever taken your children back to Constantinople to show them where you were born?

No, but Helen this is a very interesting one, my son Terry, my second son who just finished university, for some reason, and it's not through me, he's very much into the Constantinople history. He wants me to take him over there and I promised him when he finished university I would. Well he finished at the end of last year, so we're talking maybe later this year. He has such a passion and I really don't know where he gets it from because we haven't talked about it very much. He wants to go see where his *παππού*, grandfather, was working. He wants to see where all our family was, what they used to do and the funny part about it is his girlfriend and I hope soon a wife, she's half Greek half Scottish, she's got such a passion for it as well, it must be rubbing off on Terry. The interesting thing with her is that her mother is Scottish, half Scottish half Irish, her father is Greek and she tells me her mother's more Greek than the father is. So look where the generations are going.

But isn't that wonderful, for your son to want to go back to see where his roots are?

I'm really, really pleased that he is. We were in Las Vegas, Christmas time and there's a shop there with artefacts and I came back with some ancient Greek coins from Constantinople and when I was in Istanbul I managed to find maps, if you like or sketches, and I got 2 big sketches of how Constantinople was when the Turks invaded. When I showed Terry he was absolutely thrilled. So I have to take him back and just show him.

I think that's just magnificent. It really is. Does he speak Greek?

He does, he speaks because he picked it up more from his grandmother and a little bit from us I suppose, but yes he does speak Greek, enough to get by. He's not, his English is much, much better but I think even his girlfriend speaks Greek and quite well and again her *γιαγιά* [grandmother] taught her to speak Greek and she's passionate. Don't

you dare say anything bad about Greeks you know, she loves her heritage, the Scottish Irish heritage but she's very, very proud of her Greek.

You must be very proud.

I am indeed, she's a lovely girl.

Is there anything else that you want to say Peter, because I think we've come to the end of the interview, is there anything I haven't asked you?

I suppose how settled I am in Australia after all that. I'm very settled, Australia I think is still the best country in the world to live in. Myself, my friends, my family, would never have thoughts of going back. We are Australians. But we are proud of our heritage. We're proud of our religion and I suppose that's what is binding us in the Greek community, it's more the Greek Orthodox religion, that brings us all together and when, we may not see each other for five or 10 years, but we'll go to a Greek function and there we are we embrace each other and we're Greek Australians, we've got the best of both worlds.

And it's wonderful isn't it?

I love it.

Thank you very much Peter.

My pleasure.