

**Well good afternoon George. This is an interview being conducted with George Giakoumis. The date is the 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2012, the location is at George's home, in Ridley Grove, at Ferryden Park. The interviewer is Joanna Tsalikis and the interview is being conducted as part of the Greek Migrant Experience, the reality of migrating to South Australia in the 1900's, Oral histories project which is an OEEGA initiative. We are funded by the Australian Government's, "Your Community Heritage Program: Sharing Community Heritage Stories". I'd also like to mention that Mrs Helen Haltis, the president of OEEGA is also sitting in on this interview and facilitating the recording equipment.**

**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, - - -.**

**So George, can we start first of all by asking you to state your full name.**

George Giakoumis

**And can you tell us when and where you were born?**

I was born in Sidirounta., Chios, island in 1925.

**Now, Chios is actually the island that's ---**

Island and the city, the island is called Chios and the main city the capital, is Chios.

**Right, and Chios I was going to say is the island that's closest to Turkey.**

Well one of the closest, I don't know which is the closest.

**Geographically**

One of the closest, yes. Not very far away I believe.

**Now, do you recall much of your childhood in Sidirounta?**

None at all really, none at all.

**Can you tell us if you had any siblings?**

Yes. I had a sister, an elder sister, Irene and later on in life, I had another two siblings, a brother and a sister.

**Right, right.**

Betty and Nick.

**Right, and I believe from the preliminary interview that your mother also had another baby while she was in Greece.**

Deceased

**So there would have been a fairly high mortality rate at that time?**

Well I don't know of course, maybe, but how would I know? I presume, but I don't know the reason of the death of the eldest one. But the other one, we know about her, Eleni, she died of diphtheria.

**Right and that was here in Australia, there was a diphtheria epidemic. Yes, there were limited medical facilities at that time for children, so that was quite sad.**

Well obviously they didn't have the technology that they have today. But I think she was pretty far gone. I don't know, she was only 6 months.

**She is now buried in the West Terrace cemetery and her name was Eleni I believe.**

Yes.

**Now, can you recall anything about your family, family background, what did your father do at the time you were in Sidirounta.**

He was an apprentice to a baker and eventually did become a baker himself.

**Right.**

A real good tradesman and eventually I believe he opened up his own business.

**Yes. And where did he do that?**

In Chios, in a few years, he started very young. I believe he was only a lad, 15-16. He served his apprenticeship more or less in the bakery for this particular gentleman.

**Right**

And then eventually he got his own business I believe, his own bakery and started up his own business.

**Ok, so he actually trained to be a baker?**

He was an apprentice as a baker.

**Can you tell me what prompted his move to Australia?**

Well I think it was like most migrants in those days they just wanted to come out here to better themselves for their families and themselves of course. There were more opportunities in countries like Australia and America and South America and all those places. People if they got the opportunity, that wanted to migrate because there wasn't much future in Greece. Greece is a very poor country as you know and I believe they

just wanted a better opportunity, make a better life for themselves and that's what prompted him to come out here.

**Do we know approximately when he would have come out here?**

Well I was 4 years old. I believe he left my mother pregnant. I was born in 1925. He came out here in 1923 or when did he come out here? I'm not quite sure but he must have come out here between my birth --- He must have come here between 1923 and 1924.

**Right, that's estimation. Now, your mother would have had to keep the family together being pregnant with a baby.**

Oh she had Rene too and of course once the old fellow came out here, my dad I suppose, got a job, of course he started to send money back which most people do now days.

**Where did he work when he came out here?**

The first job he had was in the smelters in Port Pirie. The smelter works in Port Pirie, you know the iron, and what have they got, the steel works, the zinc works isn't it? What are they called in Port Pirie?

**The steel works, yes.**

The steel works whatever it is was out there. His first job was in the foundry in Port Pirie, I believe he worked there a couple of years, not sure how long because at that stage I mean work was available everywhere. That particular job no people would take if you know what I mean, it was a very hard, dirty job in the foundry.

**That was in order to raise enough money to bring his family out?**

Well to earn money of course and send money home and then after 2 or 3 years, I can't remember how long, well I don't know, I estimate that he worked 2 or 3 years in the foundry then he came into Adelaide here and opened up his own business, a bakery by himself. Made the bread, delivered the bread; he did everything one man at a place in Sturt Street, behind Russell Street which is the - do you know Russell Street? There's a catholic school there, well that's where he first opened up his first bakery; a bag of flour, make it into bread, take it out and deliver it.

**So he was a one man band?**

One man band and that's how he progressed.

**Now there were a lot of Greeks living in the city at that stage as well.**

Well there was quite a few. We had the Greek Community.

**Now you and your sister Irini, my mother [Irini Rene Giakoumis] you came out approximately in 1929 is that correct? And had your father set up a house and everything ready for the family?**

He had this bakery business, there was a house attached to it, the house and the bakery all in one. And that's where we went, lived there for approximately I would say 2 or 3 years then he expanded the business and we went into Grey Street in Adelaide, in the west end of Adelaide, which is the other part of the city. And he rented another place there, he rented a bakery, a bigger bakery, he rented it. And then he started from there and then he started expanding, getting bigger and bigger and eventually, I'm jumping ahead but anyway, eventually he got that big, that he bought his own property down in George Street, Thebarton, which was his own bakery, his own business, they had a bakery business there before he bought it. In other words, where we were, we were paying rent, he was renting. Then when he progressed to the extent where he was able, he went to Thebarton and he bought this property.

**I see.**

He bought the property and eventually over the years he bought the next door property and the next door property, he practically owned the whole block over the years in Thebarton, George Street.

**Now he was quite an enterprising man, it seems, he also established olive groves.**

Oh boy Oh boy! This was after the bakery business finished. I didn't want the bakery, I didn't want it, I just wanted to clear out.

**Why was that?**

Well, I couldn't get on with the old fellow. He was heavy handed, physically and I may have been mischievous but no more than any other kids. But he had the physical attribute towards children, you know he punished them, when they did something wrong, he believed in the stick.

**Physical punishment. So he was a very hard man?**

Oh very hard.

**Did you entertain any sort of interest at all in being in the bakery? You obviously had other ambitions?**

I just wanted to scoot. Many times I run away and many times he brought me back.

**You ran away from home?**

Oh of course, the constabulary brought me back. He'd go to the authorities and say that I had run away and I was missing and of course the authorities would pick me up wherever I was. Sometimes I got as far as Murray Bridge and other times I got to Port Pirie, other times wherever--- As long as I got away from home and that was the story.

**Now you went to Sturt Street School, we're just going back a little bit here as well. Did you entertain any aspirations at school about what you wanted to do or---**

Academically?

**Yes.**

No. I hated school, I hated it.

**Why was that, but you were a sporting person?**

Of course I loved it. That was a different matter, but as far as academically at school, I was more interested in Geography we used to called it in those days. Geography that was my only passion as far as school work goes. Mathematically, algebra and all that other business, I wasn't into it. In other words, I wasn't a dummy but I wasn't --- I didn't show the interest I should say in it.

**So as far back as then, as a young boy, you were already demonstrating an interest in different countries.**

Well not different countries so much as to get away from home, anywhere if I could --- The further I got the better. I mean I didn't imagine myself leaving Australia but I thought of myself in Melbourne, Sydney, away from home, the further, the better.

**When did you decide to really rebel and make this move away from Australia?**

Well as I got older, I got older and eventually I got to the stage where I was 17 I believe and I ran away from home and worked in various factories away from home, boarded out there. I looked after myself for a while, like months or whatever, and then he'd bring me back again. And the same thing again, until eventually, you know what happened eventually.

**So in other words he wanted you to work where he could see you?**

Well he believed I should be home not out where I was.

**Ok, it must have taken a fair bit of courage then for you to really make that move away from home. When did that happen?**

Oh ever since I was that high, I just wanted to get away. Well me and him, I looked at him like some sort of a tyrant, even worse than that. I looked upon him. My only consolation was my mother.

**How would you describe your mother in this?**

Oh angel. Everything that happened I'd run to her. Any consolation or any hugging or any signs of affection I'd go to her, but as far as he was concerned, not that he was a --- I don't know, as I said he was such a generous man on the other hand, generous. You know if I wanted something he'd give it to me.

**So financially you got what you wanted.**

I mean materially. He even bought a pony for me, a horse, which was for me and for the work of course, more or less, the type of horse that was suited for a smaller cart to deliver bread in.

**Now as you got older obviously getting passed your late teens.**

Not late teens up until about 17.

**17, Well that's late teens I guess. When did you decide to leave home for good and what prompted that move?**

I keep referring to --- I wanted to get away from home at any cost.

**But, how did that happen?**

At that stage, it was the early part of the war, 1942, here in Australia. There were a lot of Greek ships on the coast here, as a matter of fact Livanis the company had four ships sailing around the coast here because the Australians never had much of a merchant marine and Greek ships were available then because they couldn't go back to Greece because Greece was under occupation you understand. So therefore, all these Greek ships and all the other Greek ships were travelling the world chartering, getting the cargo, chartering wherever they could, because, as we said, they couldn't go to Greece, because Greece was under occupation. So there were 3 or 4 ships to this particular Levanis company, he was from Chios too, he had 4 ships on the coast that I remember distinctly, well I was on 3 of them. He had Eva Levanis, the Mary Levanis and the

Chios Levanis and the GS Levanis. He had 4 ships going around the coast here and their job was to take iron ore from Whyalla to the eastern states, mainly Canberra and Newcastle, discharge and bring back coal from there back to Osborne here for the power house and the same thing again, back to Whyalla and that was the trip. I'm talking about Livanis' ships, what they were doing.

**He was the Greek shipping magnate basically?**

Yes. One of his daughters married into the Onassis family, I don't know which one, there was Christina, some relation, I'm not quite sure, but one of them. Well they were all into those shipping owners and Greece had one of the biggest merchant shipping marines in the world. She was third in the world.

**So Greece was a shipping nation?**

Yes. Well I mean I think England was first, America, maybe Greece because she had a lot of ships.

**Now if I can just bring the story back to your involvement. How did you come to be involved in the ships, in the merchant navy? Can you tell us how that came about?**

Well obviously when the ships were here, crews used to come ashore and go into the Greek clubs and one thing and another and I met a few of the crew members.

**How did you get to meet the crew members?**

In the Greek club, in the clubs at the καφενεία [coffee shops].

**Was your father there as well?**

No, nothing to do with the old man, just me and the people in the καφενείο [coffee shop]. And I knew there was Greek ships on the coast, so then lo and behold, one of the Greek captains met my father personally ashore in the clubs, the καφενείο [coffee shop], wherever and he happened to be a fellow called Liptis, his name and he was from Chios too so they socialised.

**Forged the connection?**

Whenever the captain's ship used to come in here, he was on the Eli, whenever she came into Adelaide, Osborne, he had a couple of days ashore, he'd come and see the old fellow and the old fellow would make - you know have dinner and that's where my brain thought, "I wonder if he'd give me a job?". I said to him one day you know, when the old man wasn't there, "You don't need another crew member there do you?"

And he just laughed it off more or less and eventually he was desperate because he had to have a full crew. You couldn't sail shorthanded during the war years. That's why many Greek ships were stuck because they couldn't get a crew. The crew used to abscond.

**Why were the crews absconding?**

Because they didn't want to go to sea, they wanted to stay ashore, stay in Australia, illegally.

**So these young sea men were jumping ship in Australia.**

Seamen, jumping ships, exactly, exactly.

**So they wanted to stay and you're wanting to run away?**

Well, mine was a different cause. These people wanted to stay here to better themselves. Here is an opportunity for us to stay here and not worry about passports in Greece and go to Greece, here we are. If they catch us, they catch us, what are they going to do with us? They can't deport us back to Greece.

**So would it be correct to say that some of these young men actually joined the merchant navy from Greece ---**

Oh, from Greece, yes.

**With the intention of jumping ship?**

Oh no, no, no, it was just the opportunity. A lot of them jumped ship in America. Anywhere, you know what Greeks are like. She can understand what I'm saying. I don't know why you have difficulty comprehending that.

**We're historians we have to ask these questions.**

Well the only reason that they jumped ship was to better themselves and also get away from the war, that's another reason.

**But they were doing it illegally.**

Of course, you're an illegal immigrant.

**Did you know any of these particular ---**

Oh yes, as a matter of fact at the latter part when I finished up being a sea men, Greek sea men, my dad used to sponsor them, those that jumped ship. You know, they needed



a sponsor and the old man being established in business he sponsored, if you know what I mean, is that the word I use, sponsor?

**Yes.**

So they could stay here and eventually they did get their papers to stay here because they had a sponsor. Eventually they did get Australian citizenship, eventually because the old man sponsored them. So he did a lot of good that way too.

**Now, we've established that you've made this connection with this captain, so what happens next? You couldn't tell your father that, that's what you were planning.**

No, no he knew I got the job but I didn't get it at home through the old man. I just went aboard the ship and he said okay and he told the old man that I came aboard the ship and he'd given me a job because he wanted men so the ship could sail because he couldn't sail short handed. He notified the old man that "I got your son aboard this ship and I gave him a job" and the old man said that's fine but he said, "If ever the ship leaves the coast to go overseas you discharge him", get rid of him in other words, don't let him go overseas, because the old man didn't want me to go overseas for various reasons. And that's what eventually happened, that's what happened.

**So can you tell us how that came about?**

Well, Ah boy oh boy! We were in Newcastle in New South Wales and the ship got orders. We were expecting to come from Newcastle back to Adelaide again on the usual run, we'd come back to get coal and take it back to Osborne, Adelaide but eventually --- It turned out that she wasn't coming back to South Australia, she was going overseas, where and when, I didn't know. So as soon as the old captain of the ship knew that, that the ship wasn't going back to South Australia, he immediately called me up and said "George" he said "I'm going to discharge you", so he threw me off the ship, paid me off in other words. So I finished up in Newcastle on the beach, no ship right? Then from there, I went to Sydney, I didn't come back home, I didn't want to come back here, I went to Sydney and whilst in Sydney I got an opportunity --- There was another Greek ship in Sydney waiting for crew again, shorthanded and I got it through the grape vines, through sea men's word of mouth, this particular ship, the Mary Livanis wanted a crew and by that time I knew enough on the ship to be able to call myself as a working party, like in I knew what I was doing.

**You'd acquired some experience now as a seaman.**

And then I joined this Mary Livanis in Sydney and this ship was loading flour for Colombo. And that's what happened. We left Sydney after a few days or weeks in Sydney, I can't remember, we finished up in Colombo with the flour, Then we started to trade around the Indian Ocean, various ports and various cargos. Eventually, we finished up in a place called Lorenzo Marks which is Portuguese, East Africa, Mozambique they call it today.

### **Mozambique**

They changed names of course and that's when we left the Lorenzo Marks on our way to Egypt, no I'm getting ahead of myself.

**Now, can I just interrupt quickly here, so you're in Mozambique and what I want to ask now is by this stage did your family, did your father and mum know?**

They'd knew I'd gone overseas but they didn't know where or how or what.

**Right.**

They knew I had left Australia through the grape vine, through other sea men. Someone told the old man your son sailed on.

**So you took the bull by the horns and ---**

Oh yeah, I was as happy as Larry.

**Alright, so now we're in Mozambique and?**

Yep. So we loaded coal to take to Alexandria. We got to Alexandria and I told you before I had no papers whatsoever, no British, no nationality papers whatsoever. So when we got to Alexandria a lot of the Greek sea men, being a Greek community --- A lot of Greek people in Egypt, as you know, a lot of them decided to pay off there. They were allowed to pay off, and just because--- At that stage the war was nearing its end, it was 1943, 1944, it was still going any how. But they thought they'd be more handier there from there to go back to Greece, in other words when the war ended. Any how, for various reasons they paid off there. Me I wasn't allowed to go ashore. When the authorities come aboard, everyone goes and presents their papers to the immigration authorities and the ships learn, you go up and blah blah and they give you a shore pass so you can go ashore. When I presented myself, they said to the authorities, they said to the captain "Where's this man's papers?" He said, "He hasn't got any", "Oh well you can't go ashore". So they didn't give you a shore pass in other words and actually what

they did do was put an Egyptian police man aboard the ship guarding the gang way so I couldn't go ashore.

**Oh, so you were under lock and key?**

No, no I had the run of the ship but just getting off the ship.

**But you weren't allowed to ---**

He had his eye on me in other words, around the ship.

**Yes, yes, okay.**

And eh --- that's what happened. Oh, I'll tell you the story about my escapade when I - -- Oh yeah!

**Well we need to know about that.**

Well I tried to bribe the policeman, I said, I'll never forget his name, his name was Mahmout, I'll never forget it. I said "Mahmout, look" I said, "I'll give you 5 pounds, English pounds, let me go ashore"

**That would have been a lot of money then.**

Oh, of course, nearly a month's wages. "Then let me go ashore", I said "I don't want to stay here, I just want to go ashore and enjoy myself, see the delights of Alexandria". All the others are out there enjoying themselves and there's me stuck on the ship after a long trip. And he said "No George, you show me kalabous, me got children, worry". Any how to cut a long story short I managed to sneak ashore without him knowing. I went and did what I did all that night. I met some of the crew ashore, in a particular cabaret. Βγάλαμε τα μάτια μας [we let our hair down] as the saying goes, we enjoyed ourselves, one thing and another.

**Oh you had a good time George?**

Oh yes. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I finished up in the lower part of Alexandria, if you know what I mean.

**So the naughty, naughty**

Well, the bordellos, call it what you like, café, bordello, call them what you like. Anyhow eventually I found my way back to the ship in the early hours of the morning. I went back, never saw the policeman, I just went back to my cabin and turned in.

Around about 10 in the morning the cabin was filled with authorities, the captain of the ship, the British authorities, the Egyptian authorities.

**All these people?**

Yes, for the sake of me. The English man said, the English person said to me, he said “oh you’re back”, I said “yeah of course I’m back”. He said “did you enjoy yourself”, I said “yes” but the Greek captain was fuming because it’s his responsibility, he's got to cop the whatever happens, because of me. If I never came back to the ship he was responsible. It’s a big responsibility. And he was fuming. Anyhow that was that, they said, I remember him saying to me, they all laughed and pissed off and, pardon the expression, left me alone and said, ‘go, go, you’re alright, no worries’. And I think within in a couple of days we sailed anyhow, but I was happy. I had my --- I did what I did and had one night ashore. But I remember him saying to me, I’ll never forget, he said “Θα σε κανονίσω”, [I’ll sort you out], the Captain said to me.

**So he threatened you in a way?**

My escapade, what he meant, what are you going to do to me? And then we left Egypt. Oh boy! We went and loaded salt in Port Said, the salt we took to Calcutta, rock salt, you know not refined salt.

**So you’re on your way to India?**

We finished up in India, Calcutta. Whilst in Calcutta, the chief steward of the ship, the *καμαρώτη* [steward], happened to know the Greek Consulate, they were school mates. They grew up together in Greece from what part of the country she comes from, this lady [indicating Helen]. Oh he came from Peloponnesus so did he, in other words they grew up together in school. The man on the ship knew the Greek Consulate and he said to me, “rather than have the problems that you’re having going to various ports where they won’t let you go ashore, because you have no identification; why don’t we get you a temporary identification because in certain ports you don’t need identification because British ports, under the allies.”

**Right.**

Some ports in America for example, you couldn’t go ashore with no identification but in other ports you don’t need it. They just give you a ship’s pass and go ashore and

come back. Anyhow, that's what happened, I got a temporary identity card which was so and so with my photographs stamped and I had this piece of --- anyhow.

**But this temporary identity card ---**

Sea men's identity card, φυλλάδιο it's called, seaman's passport.

**Was this with your real name or a false name?**

No, no, my real name of course.

**Okay, okay.**

Told him the particulars that I knew, as far as Sidirounta where I was born, all the other particulars. A witness, my friend, she witnessed it.

**So for the first time you had proper papers?**

It wasn't a book; it was just a folded piece of paper, cardboard, whatever.

**Right, some identification.**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, with a photograph on it. From there, we went to Lorenzo Marks again. I've been several trips to Lorenzo Marks and Durban, in South Africa, bringing coal from there back to Egypt. Lorenzo Marks, anyhow that's when this incident happened, we left Lorenzo Marks and on the way to Egypt we got torpedoed.

**Now, before you tell this story, your ship is actually --- This is war time, so there would have been a certain amount of risk for these cargo ships. Did you ever feel nervous or frightened about being on boats where you could have been attacked by the enemy?**

To be honest with you, I thought it was a great big adventure.

**Right. So you weren't ever worried about it?**

No, I'm not being bravado it's just --- I loved it, I thought I was John Wayne. [laughter]  
Really, really, I mean I'm not joking. I didn't realise I suppose that like you said, the threatening part of the situation.

**There was an excitement for you about that.**

Of course there was.

**Did the ship have any sort of protective guns?**

Yes, yes we did.

**Oh, it did?**

Yes, we had armament on board, we had a cannon and we had smaller arms, machine guns.

**And were there men specially hired for that?**

Yes, particular men from the navy.

**So they were military men?**

Military personnel, yes, they were navy personnel.

**And their job was specifically to man these guns?**

To look after the guns of the ship, yes exactly.

**Right.**

But they were more or less used for aircrafts and submarine but you couldn't see the submarine. You can't shoot a submarine if you can't see it.

**Right**

More concerned in convoy, when we got a lot of ships together and they are all firing their arms together, you know it's a bit of something to go --- You know, you're sharing something to the enemy but one single ship. It's neither here nor there.

**Right, so what happened now?**

Well, the ship sunk, we got into the boat.

**But first tell me how the incident occurred. Did you know that --- Did you have any idea that there was any enemy out there? So how did it happen?**

Oh I think the captain must have known that they were in enemy waters, of course, well not enemy waters but there are enemy submarines around. He knew there was a war time patrol for submarines, you know what I mean?

**Right, so when did you first realise on the ship that something had gone wrong?**

When the explosion occurred.

**Right, and what was the reaction?**

The reaction was panic. The Greeks were running around like --- Can you imagine the emotion of Greeks? "Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου" [my God, my God], they were looking to the gods to save them instead of being practical and trying to get the life boat away.

**So, some people lost emotional control?**

No, not all of them, most of them. Yeah, yeah and the first, first, first thought was that she was going to go down quick, but she didn't go down quick, she lasted 4 or 5 hours. When we got into the boat and rowed away, about 100 metres away from the ship, they decided, seeing as she wasn't going to go down, they'd go back aboard the ship and get their personal gear.

**This is the crew we are talking about?**

The crew and the captain going aboard the ship to get his personal papers, whatever he wanted to get, but the crew wanted to get their personal --- Which they carried, a lot of gold with them because in various countries paper money was no good, but when they got their money from pay they used to turn it into gold sovereigns. Paper money was no good in an occupied country so a lot of them had quite a substantial amount of money plus other gadgets, whatever they had, I don't know, I had nothing. But I'm saying they decided to go back aboard the ship to get these material things, and that's what happened. They went back, gathered whatever they could, whatever you can carry with you, not big, big bundles but personal things, you know, money, small stuff, whatever.

**So they went back to the ship, and---**

And back onto the boat we rowed away.

**And how many life boats were there?**

Only the one, we carried two life boats but because the way the ship sunk, we couldn't lower the two because one boat, ships like that right. [Indicating how the boat tilted] It went like that, now this boat on this side came from inside, so in other words you couldn't lower that boat because it was inside the ship. The other one was practically in the water. All we had to do was just free it up from its block and tackles. So anyhow one boat was enough, 28 of us, there was 32 originally.

**So there was loss of life?**

Four, two down below and two on top, which the two down below falling machinery, they happened to be in the wrong spot at the wrong time. But, that's what happened.

**So you are in these life boats now after having retrieved --- The men having retrieved their gold and now what happens?**

Oh I don't know what time, well what time it lapsed, about 100 metres away again we heard this gurgling, bubbling, roaring sound. The submarine surfaced.

**Good heavens.**

German submarine. We rode towards them and they came towards us, we tied up along side, the boat and the submarine. The German commander invited our captain aboard the ship for a *tete a tete*, a discussion, whatever they wanted to do. The German sailors on the submarine come to the side and started throwing us whisky, cigarettes, dried goods, cakes and biscuits and we were talking. Some could speak English, not Greek of course. Some could speak English and I could sort of, liaison, "how you going", of course, and all of this. They were very, very friendly, you know what I mean, sociable. Eventually after, I don't know, 30 minutes, the captain of our ship came back aboard off the submarine to the boat and then he gave us a tow line. He tied our boat to the submarine and towed us. Gave us a tow to a place called Mombasa, which is on the east coast of Africa, and that's where he towed us practically all day from about 1 o'clock in the afternoon till about 7 o'clock at night, where he took us right to the entrance of the harbour and left us there and 'Auf Wiedersehen' [goodbye] and away he went. There were some fishermen there, fishing in boats, local fishermen and they more or less took us practically onto the wharf. And that's where we finished in there, in Mombasa, now in Mombasa ---

**Now before you go on with this, can you remember the name of the commandant?**

Broomberg.

**Broomberg**

That's the gentleman commander, Broomberg, that's right. I remember that distinctly.

**That was very civilised of them.**

Well I think most merchant seamen have something in common, they are mostly cordial to one another. There were atrocities, we've said this before, but in general seamen have a common bond.

**So there's an unspoken rule of men at sea?**

I think so, it doesn't matter what nationality, Japanese, whatever, they have a common bond, yeah. Oh that's about it, oh wait a minute, how did I get there.

**So now, where are you now? You've gone to a lot of places**



In Mombasa. And lo and behold, in Mombasa you wouldn't want to know there's a Livanis ship stuck there short of crew, including the captain who had been laid down with typhoid fever, the captain of the Chios Livanis, this is another Livanis ship. We had the Mary, the Eli, the Mary sunk of course, and now we've got the Chios. She'd been there, I don't know how long, because of a shortage of crew and plus some sickness, I said typhoid had run through the ship and lo and behold, all of a sudden there is this crew, ready made crew for her, us. Not all of us but the majority of us went back onto the Chios, and then from there where did we finish up? Back to Egypt, Alexandria and when we got to Alexandria that's when it happened. He said "I didn't put you ashore last time but I'm going to put you ashore now", the captain.

**The one that had got cross with you before?**

His name was Ασπιώτης, [Aspiotis].

**Aspiotis**

Well he was fed up with me I suppose. Then the Greek authorities came aboard. Last time they came on board, I told you they couldn't take me away. Anyhow I was able to land in Egypt because of the nationality I had, the paperwork, you know what I mean, I was allowed to, he was allowed to take me off. And that's where I finished up in Egypt, in Alexandria. And that's when I think word got to the old man that I was stuck in Egypt I believe and I believe he --- In Sydney, the Livanos Company had a supervisor captain in Sydney in an office there, what would you call him? A liaison officer for the Greek ships, for the company ships around the coast of Australia. I believe my old man flew to Sydney with a mate of his and went to Sydney and told this senior captain, that if you ever see the young fellow, if anyone that knows of him or knows can you give him a job on a ship and get him out of here because he knew what was going to happen. They were going to take me back to Greece to join the Greek army. By that time the war had finished.

**But they were now hoping to conscript you in the Greek army?**

Yes. Yes, yes.

**They are out to get you George aren't they?**

Well did you know that I got conscripted papers sent here?

**Good heavens.**

Oh yes, I had conscription papers sent from Greece to here stating that I was eligible for the army. I believe you can buy your way out, I am not sure, I don't know what the system is.

**Well that wouldn't be surprising would it?**

How are they going to get me from there to there, that's how stupid they are. Now what they wanted, I think they wanted a financial gain, I don't know, I don't know.

**So, what happens now?**

So, when I heard that, through the grape vine again, that people were looking for me, I was under the impression that the authorities were looking for me, the Greek authorities and it wasn't the Greek authorities, it was the people from the company trying to find me to give me a job. But me, when I heard they were looking for me, I automatically thought it was the Greek authorities. So I cleared out from Alexandria and went to Port Said and that's where I joined this British ship and that's where I finished up, on British ships. I joined a British ship.

**And how did the British ships compare to the Greek ships?**

The only thing is food, different food, other than that it's practically the same thing, works the same. The war had finished by then and I joined a ship called the Fort Ire which was an English ship.

**Can you say that name again?**

Fort Ire, Canadian, after Forts in Canada. Fort Ire, I joined her and we sailed around the Mediterranean and North Africa even went to Greece twice, once to Piraeus and once to Salonika taking army equipment. When we went to Piraeus, that was when the κίνημα [movement] was on, the war had finished and the other stuff had started, the civil war and we would take British equipment and British troops to Piraeus to help the Government. We also did a trip to Salonika and we were trading in the Mediterranean for 5 or 6 months there, Italy, North Africa, Casablanca, Algiers just in that area there in the Mediterranean. Eventually we finished up in a place called Bari, in Italy.

**Can you clarify that name?**

Bari, it's on the east coast, southern east coast of Italy. Whilst there we loaded New Zealand army equipment for the occupation forces for the Commonwealth forces in Japan. You had the Americans and you had the Commonwealth, so the New

Zealanders were part of that. So we took their gear and 30 or 40 soldiers as passengers which stayed in the gunner's accommodation. Remember I told you we use to have gunner people, well they stayed in the gunners accommodation. Anyhow we took them from Bari to Kurri in Japan which is only 20 miles from Hiroshima; it's an inland port, one of the biggest ports in Japan.

**Now what year roughly would this have been?**

Well the war had finished so it must have been 1946, roughly 1946. And from Japan eventually after we discharged whatever we did, we went from there to Vancouver, on the west coast of Canada.

**Can I just take you back just a moment, at some point I believe in our preliminary interview you mentioned that you'd been imprisoned with some other men as well.**

This is a different part of the story again.

**Right, okay.**

We finished up in Vancouver, we stayed a couple of months there stripping the armaments as I told you before, the guns and that, they weren't necessary anymore so we had quite a lengthy stay in Vancouver and finished back, from there we got a load of grain and brought it back to England. Then I got another English ship and that's where we finished up back in, finished up in --- Where did we go? To Jakarta, Indonesia, we were loading copra. We went to a place called Makassar and loaded copra and then we part loaded and then we went to Tanja Prio which is a port, of Batavia, what do they call it now? What's the capital? Jakarta, it was Batavia in those days. We liked the place that much that me and this other fellow decided to stay there, jump ship in other words. That's where we had a romantic interlude with two young ladies and we decided to stay instead of going back to the ship.

**Are you going to give us some insight into that or not? [Laughter]**

Well we only stayed there for a week or so because our money ran out. What do we do? We go to the Australian Consulate and they are obligated to give you money to tie you over, that's another story. So we stayed there and he said "look if you don't clear out of here I'll have to repatriate you back to Australia, you can't stay here, you're illegal". All he was concerned about was getting us off his hands. So I said "leave it to us we'll get a ship". Whilst in the cafés of Jakarta, the port, we met some Dutch seamen on a ship, their ship, and they said they are going to Singapore in the morning. I

said can we have a ride because it must be easier to get a ship in Singapore then it is there, because Singapore is a big, big, big, transshipping place, plenty of shipping. We thought we had much more of a chance of getting a ship in Singapore because I didn't want to come back to Australia, much more chance of getting a ship in Singapore than it is where we were an out of the way port. And that's what happened, they gave us a ride, stowaway, they knew we were part of the crew and to cut a long story short, it was only a 15 hour ride, trip from Java to Singapore, overnight. We got there the next morning mixed with the crew, they got the boat, we didn't go along side, we anchored. So we had to get a boat to launch to take ashore. So we got in with the crew, went to the jetty, they are all showing their passes and they went through, of course we intermingled with the others as we went through they didn't look at us. They knew that they are part of the crew of that ship. They in other words, they didn't take particular notice of us two with the group of people that we were with. You follow me? In other words we landed in Singapore.

#### **So you were a bit inconspicuous?**

Going ashore, but once there again, seamen have hostels all over the world, merchant marine hostiles, they call them Stella Maris, Star of the Sea, merchant navy clubs, call them what you like but for seamen all over the world, in various ports. So we stayed at the merchant navy club in Singapore. In the mean time we presented ourselves once again to the Australian Consulate, we wanted money and they are obligated to give you money, and this went on for about a fortnight. Eventually the immigration officer from the local authorities, a fellow called Nobel, he was a Eurasian chap, he said "Look fellas, I can't give you any more leeway, they are going to kill me", he said, "I'll get into trouble, I have to present you to the authorities, it's my job on the line", in other words he's got to present us. So that's what happened, we went before the court and the court, they have the authority to give you deportation, so we went before this British judge and he outlined the case to him and said they are only a couple of stupid seamen in other words, he didn't say that but that's what he meant. But the British judge was very, very strict, he said "I don't mind being this and being that" but what irritated him, he said, "how the devil did they get ashore? We have strict security measures here". This was on account of the trouble with the Malay/Singapore, you heard about this? Do you know about this? And there was strict security reasons, and he was more concerned about how we got ashore, cos you know we could have been anything, we

could have been spies, we could have been saboteurs. Anyway to cut a long story short, he said 3 months jail pending deportation.

**So you were jailed?**

So we went to jail in a place called Outram not Changi. There's two jails in Singapore.

**Can you clarify that name?**

Outram, named after an old British general I believe Outram. Location was Pearls Hill. Pearls Hill was the suburb, the jail was Outram.

**So now you're in jail with your mate.**

Yep. But jail was like a picnic to us, we had the run of the jail. The commandant of the jail thought we weren't crims just stupid idiots again. He gave us the run of the jail; we could go anywhere we wanted. We could go anywhere we wanted in the jail.

Eventually after, about 4 or 5 weeks, I don't know it wasn't 3 months, they put us on a ship from Singapore to Fremantle. I got to Fremantle and then the old man sent me over 50 pound. I flew from Fremantle back to Adelaide and that's the end of the story.

**So you were --- That must have been a pretty big highlight in your life as a young man, being at sea, how would you describe those years generally?**

Oh I would do it all over again.

**You don't regret any of the decisions you've made?**

I would do it all over again. I wish I could go to sea now.

**Really? We'll have to bury you at sea.**

I loved it, I loved it. [laughter]

**Now when you finally came back to Australia, how old were you then?**

1948, 23

**Right, and when you finally came back what did you ---**

When I came back that's when the old man had the olive grove going.

**Right, and what did you do there?**

And I remember him saying you can come and help us pick olives. I did that for 5 or 6 ---, I don't know how long, all I wanted to do was get back to sea again. I helped the old man for a month or two months, I can't remember. I went down to the shipping

office, the union office in Port Adelaide and I joined the union, the seamen's union, the Australian Seaman's Union and I got a job on the coast. I originally started on the coast and I finished on the coast doing the same run practically on Australian ships.

**So you basically finished your career touring around Australia on ships?**

Back where I started. Yes.

**Now obviously that was the time of your life, the highlight of your life from what you're saying. And I'm sure you had a lot of other adventures but if I can just bring you back to Australia now. Once your seafaring adventures were over, now what happened then? You went to work for the breweries and you married later in life.**

I stayed on the coast here from 1948 right till the late 1950's. That must have been from 1948 to say 1959, say 1960, what's that 12 years isn't it? And another 8 years I spent around overseas before then, so its 20 years I spent at sea.

**It's a long time.**

Yes. Then that's when I met her mother [indicates Markella, his daughter]

**You're talking about Penny? And you had a daughter?**

Yes. That's when I left the sea and got a job at the brewery and met her mother and that's how it started.

**Right, and you had a daughter Markela, named after your mother. And how would you compare your life when you finally came back to Australia after having had all these adventures as a young man, did you feel a bit of sadness? You just accepted that as part of your life, the most exciting time of your life?**

I think it's more part of acceptance I think. As I said I didn't regret anything. As I said I would do it all over again. It was a wonderful experience, wonderful, meeting people around the world, the other side of the world, the ups and downs you know I've seen some sights that would make your hair curl.

**Now there is a little picture we saw of you in a little sailor's suit, now this is --- I think you were 3 or 4 so did you always have this infinity with the sea? Or just something that happened?**

It just happened that way, but it happened because I was more concerned about going away, getting away, the further, the better. The sea was better than being ashore, 100 - 500 miles away from land, better to be at sea. I loved the sea anyway, I loved it.

**And coming back to --- Once you settled back into Australia, did you sustain any friendships with any of those young men that had jump ship, did any of them stay in Adelaide?**

No, I never, never, never, met any of them at all, some of the old crew, no I didn't. I believe while I was away, a Greek ship called into Port Adelaide and a crew member that I happened to be crew with before, knew that I had come from Adelaide and knew the name and I believe he called home asking about my whereabouts, he was a ship mate of mine from previous bygone days. That's the only knowledge I've got, other than that I never saw or heard of any of them since then. Well they were mostly Greek people, not only that, but you must remember on Greek ships at that stage, you could go on any Greek ship and you would find any nationality under the sun, every nationality under the sun because they couldn't get crews. I remember the first ship I went to the Eli Levanis, when I went aboard --- I went on board, I went into the mess room where we eat and there's this big American, Negro, 7 foot tall, speaking Greek better than the Χιώτης [Chiotis] with a Χιώτη [Chiotian] accent.

**That's very interesting.**

It astounded me and I said what's going on here? I said to myself, how can we speak Greek? I was dumb founded and eventually it all came out, he'd been on Greek ships ever since he was a teenager, 14 or 15 and he learnt the language, Greek, Greek better than I could speak. I'm saying we had all nationalities, because they would take anyone.

**On the Greek ships were you speaking Greek most of the time?**

Yes, most of the time. The captain, the officers were all Greek.

**Right, you also had the advantage of good English so when you worked on the British ships ---**

Well of course.

**So you were a bit multilingual?**

Well I learnt more Greek on the ships than I did before. --- Whilst there --- My Greek was really starting to get limited but when I went on the Greek ships, it would come back to me again, you know Greek, speaking Greek, because I was on Greek ships.

**George it has been a really amazing story, I'm just wondering just before we finish up the interview, if there is anything else you really want to add to this story?**

No, you practically got everything. I can't think of anything else. Oh, there's been other incidents after the war, but nothing, nothing ---

**Look, I think it's been a very interesting and very rich experience for both you and me and Helen as well who's been sitting in on the interview and we wish you the very best of luck and we hope to see you at the launch next year. Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed.**

Oh I'm glad you liked it. Much appreciated and I thank you too.

**Thank you.**