

This is an interview with sisters Christina Theodorou and Mira Zacharia on Wednesday 17th April 2013 in Hawthorn.

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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 Christina and Mira and thank you for taking part in this project.

We will begin with you Christina can you tell me where you were born please.

Christina: I was born in Aradippou Cyprus in 1943.

And where about is that?

Christina: It's the south side of the island near Larnaca, which has an airport there.

It is one of the biggest cities in southern Cyprus.

And Mira can we get your full name please for the recording.

Mira: My full name is Mira Zacharia and I was born in Aradippou Cyprus in 1948.

And your parents did they come from Cyprus as well.

Christina: Both from Cyprus Aradippou.

And what did your parents do for a living Christina?

Christina: My father was a farmer before he came to Australia.

What did he have on the farms?

Christina: He would grow produce wheat, watermelons, rockmelons, figs.

And he would sell to the markets?

Christina: They would go around and sell them to other villages that did not grow that particular produce.

Would you say that it was a comfortable life?

Christina: It was comfortable for them for what they knew how to live.

Mira, this was not the first time that your father thought of coming to Australia, was it, he had been here before.

Mira: Our father originally came in 1927, worked and went back to Cyprus but obviously things were hard so he came back again in the early '30s. During that time I

think work was difficult here because of the depression. Dad worked in Western Australia chopping timber and he lived with the Aborigines. He saw corroborees, he would tell us great stories about his life style here, which would have been extremely difficult. He told us once how he would go to get his bread, his food, to eat and he'd find that a rat had eaten through the whole loaf of bread and all he had left was the crust and he could not do anything about it because he was out in no man's land. So he had a hard life and then he went back to Cyprus in 1939.

Both times he was here on his own as a young man, why did he choose Australia?

Mira: His [older] brother was here. His brother had come to Australia before our father and his brother married a woman from our village, and they lived in Adelaide so that would have always been a drawcard for dad.

And he came here, to earn some money and send back to home?

Mira: Yes, he was earning money and sending it back to his widowed mother who had no way of living without that income.

But after a while, he obviously missed them and he went back to Cyprus after the first time but then again back to Australia to earn more money?

Mira: Yes I believe so. I think that even though he was always drawn back to his homeland, he found that he couldn't make a decent living and he needed to come back here and I think by then Australia was pulling him, he actually really liked Australia.

So when he goes back the second time, he stayed there for a number years and then he married your mum?

Mira: He met our mother, I think very soon after he went in '39. He was sitting at the men's club or καφενείο [coffee house] as we call it, he saw the young ladies of the village going to the 'foundana', which is a modern version of the well, to draw water for their homes. The houses in those days had no water, and he asked who mum was, he was attracted to mum, even from a distance. I remember mum telling us that she had seen dad sitting at the club and she asked who this stranger was because he was from a different part of the village, and she was told that he had come from Australia. So that was a real drawcard for her, to know someone who had come from so far. Not long after that they sent someone [a matchmaker] to ask for mum and within a month, I think, they were married. They married on New Year's Eve in 1939.

And how many years were they working and living in Cyprus before they decided that Australia was going to be their home again?

Mira: The war had stopped dad from coming back in 1939. Dad ended up staying until 1949 and then he [had] decided life was pretty hard, as most of Europe was in those days, and he thought that he would be better off coming to Australia. By this time they had two daughters, that meant dowries and I think Dad was a very prudent man and thought that life would be better for us all in Australia.

Christina those years that mum and dad were in Cyprus you were what, about seven years old when you left for Australia, do you remember much of your childhood in Cyprus?

Christina: Not a terrible lot. Only that we just played in the street, and because I was not of school age yet, it was just mum telling us stories, running to neighbours, a very free life.

Was it a happy life?

Christina: Of course. Because you never want what you don't know.

Exactly. And mum and dad seemed happy enough, for you children, because by this stage they had the four children, but it was hard for them?

Christina: It was hard because to make a living from the farm --- Part of his dowry from mum was a little grocery shop, so they were running that as well as doing the farming.

Do you remember when the decision was made, what happened in the household, when dad said we will have to go to Australia?

Christina: Not at all

You cannot remember at all. Do you remember dad leaving?

Christina: No. I remember us leaving, but not dad leaving.

So how long was dad gone to Australia before he decided to bring the family across?

Christina: Two years.

Do you remember your trip?

Christina: I remember the trip very well. A lot of Cyprians on the trip.

And how did you come here?

Christina: By the boat called Assimina, and I think it took us something like six weeks to get here and how we went to Larnaca, which was near the port where the boat docked and we had to get in a little boat and go onto the big boat on a steep stairs which must have been very scary for a seven year old. But that was how it was done then, and

the life on the boat was, you know, trying to eat and keep it down. We went to Fremantle, and then to Melbourne and dad was there to pick us up.

So how did you get from Melbourne to Adelaide?

Christina: By train.

Do you remember much about that long train ride?

Christina: I don't remember much about the train but I do remember eating a pie, which was yucky. Because it wasn't olives and cheese.

So the whole family arrives in Adelaide and dad was here already, so he was established in Adelaide. What work did he do while you were still in Cyprus?

Christina: He was working for Holden's and also working for Star Grocery. It was the only continental place where you could get coffee and Greek cheese at that time. So he would be packing coffee and working at Holden's.

So when mum and the children arrived in Adelaide, where did you live?

Christina: Dad had purchased a house in Harriet Street, off Halifax Street, but the lady who owned the house [originally] wanted to rent it until we came, and when we came, she wanted to rent it longer, so we had to stay with another Cyprian family until her lease had finished and she got out.

So when the lease finished you were able to move into your own home.

Christina: Oh yes

It was much more comfortable, obviously, in a home of your own.

Christina: Oh yes. It was a tin shed for a kitchen and there was no laundry, mum had a washing machine in the shed and we used to have to pull it out and do the washing and then push it back into the shed when we had finished. The bathroom, there were no vanities and mirrors. We would have our showers once a week, all in one go, and then we would sit by the wooden stove and have our tea on a Saturday night, after we had cleaned the house. But it was fun because all the kids in the street would play, we would go to the square, Hurtle Square, until we were of school age. We did that for a month, two months, then we started school, at the beginning of the year.

Do you remember your first few years of school. How did you go?

Christina: Yes. It was good. We didn't realise we could not speak the language, because most of the children there were Greek anyway.

How did the teachers cope?

Christina: Well they were used to us. They taught us what they did, and we would make friends with the Australian children.

And being young you would have picked up the language quickly.

Christina: And we picked it up straight away of course.

Mira, you were still very young when you came, weren't you, to Australia.

Mira: I was just over two.

So you stayed home with mum.

Mira: I stayed home with mum and I have no recollection of the voyage over or anything. I remember dad saying that for ten months, while we lived with the other Cyprian family until our house was available for us to live in, that I was sleeping in the suitcase. So we were four children and two adults in one room for ten months. That was all and I can't remember any of that, just what I remember dad saying.

But a lot of that was done in those days because accommodation was short. Where did your dad work at that time?

Mira: Dad worked at Holden's and then he also worked in the factory that Star Grocery owned, not in the actually store of Star Grocery. Then dad had an accident and he damaged his eye. They gave him a payout figure and with that money he bought a little grocery shop in Sturt Street. That was actually a good provider for the family. We were not [that] comfortable but at least we had food, we had clothes and we had shelter.

Was dad able to work in the shop on his own?

Mira: He worked on his own and I think he might have had someone helping him maybe a few hours a week, if I remember rightly, and then [when] Christina, my elder sister, turned about 13 - 14 it was just a given that she was going to leave school, help mum at home and help dad out in the shop.

By this stage your parents had other children as well, so there were babies to look after as well. How many more children did your parents have after.

Mira: Mum had two within a year and half of us arriving in Australia, and then she had our brother in 1957, our youngest brother and in '64 she had our youngest sister. We were a big family and we were all living in this maisonette in Harriet Street. So mum needed all the help she could get.

That was a lot of work, eight children. Now with your dad, his command of the English language.

Mira: Dad's command of English was quite good and he actually could read and write quite well. He always read the paper, and he used to keep his own books in relation to his business. Which was quite unusual in those days for someone of dad's era.

Yes. Where did he learn his English?

Mira: I think he just picked it up, all the years since he had come out, he had picked it up. But at home we talked mainly in Greek.

That was one thing that the migrants insisted, wasn't it, that the children maintain their Greek. Coming back to you Christina, Mira said that at thirteen dad - well it was a given that you would help dad in the shop. What was it like leaving school at such a young age, and having to work in the family shop?

Christina: Maybe because I was a [tall girl] for my age, I just thought it quite normal to leave school and go to the shop. I didn't think to question it. Or that I should have an education and with dad and mum's way of thinking, I was going to get married and didn't need the education anyway. They were trying to get as much work out of me as possible I think.

What do you remember of those childhood years, other than working in the shop, like what did you do for entertainment?

Christina: We used to play hopscotch in the street, mind you it was a very narrow street, and there wasn't a lot of traffic going past which there wasn't in those days and then after tea mum would tell us stories and you would talk with the other kids, or read books, and that was our entertainment.

It was a simple but happy lifestyle wasn't it.

Christina: It was.

Stress free?

Christina: Stress free, of course. Much better than now.

How long did you work in the shop with your dad?

Christina: Well I worked until I was seventeen. He'd changed business twice in that time, in the three years, and then when I was seventeen, I had just turned seventeen and someone from the village came to my father and said that such and such a boy [the son of] another family from Cyprus from Aradippou, was asking for my hand in marriage, and my father liked it and told me about it, and at first I said "Aren't I a little bit young?" But then they decided it was the right thing for me to do. So I did and I got married and I had three children.

Did you have any say in the matter?

Christina: Not really.

No well back then it wasn't ---

Christina: We just took it for granted our parents knew what was best for us. I don't think we were world-wise enough to have opinions of our own. There was no TV to get ideas, the books we read were all fantasy books, so when the parents said that he is from a good family and you are going to make lovely children and have a good life, because he had a car, and we didn't have a car.

What more do you want?

Christina: Yes what more do I want? (laughter)

So you got married and moved out of home, obviously, and went to a home of your own.

Christina: No I went and lived with my mother-in-law for three years, because my husband had promised his father to help him when he brought the other side of the family over. So we stayed with them for three years and I had two children there.

And you stayed home looking after the children?

Christina: I did and I would go to my dad's shop a couple of days a week. My mother-in-law, my mother would look after the baby and [I] helped out the other girls that were there, on the busy days.

What work did your husband do?

Christina: My husband was a bus driver with the state buses, MTT it was called.

Yes I think it was the MTT. And then later you decided to go into business yourselves?

Christina: Yes we did, first he tried to become a land agent, because he knew English very well, and he could read, but he had to have a telephone, and we didn't have a telephone. And we never thought of getting one. So he stayed with the buses and then we got a chance to go into business with my younger sister's husband, a fish and chip shop that his parents had, and wanted to sell, so we did that. We lasted for about a year and a half, then when we got out of that my father had to stop work because he was 72 by then and he was still working, so we bought the deli in Bowden off him. He had it for fourteen years, and we had it for another five. I'd get the kids up, take them to school, go to the deli then go pick them up from school and take them to the deli. It was just the way of life then.

Exactly, you didn't think of it did you.

Christina: They would sit at the back and do their homework, or pack lollies, 20c [a bag] so they can be ready for when kids came. We did that for five years, then we sold it and we got another deli. In the mean time the children were [older] they were fourteen and fifteen, they would always come after school and help, just like we did. It's a case of we did to our children what our parents did to us. They weren't very fanatical about school and I didn't think it was a very important part of life. I didn't know about school that much then as what I do now, but they did alright, with a bit of encouragement and a bit of them looking out in the world on their own, they realised that whatever they could do would be for themselves.

It was important and probably still is for the migrant to keep the family together, to work together, and make a better life than what they left behind.

Christina: Of course. We always strive [for] our children to have a better life than we had. So that they don't have to work as hard, and go without as much as what we did. We did it, because we didn't know any better, and that was what life dished out for us more or less.

Yes exactly, your children grew up, they married and left home. Did you continue with businesses of various sorts?

Christina: Yes we did.

What did you do?

Christina: We had a deli, in Sefton Park. They were gourmet delis then. In the meantime we [also] had two nut shops, like Ditter's type, and my husband was running one and I had one with [one of my] sisters.

Where were these shops?

Christina: There was one in Castle Plaza and one in Noarlunga and I was at the deli with another sister. We always seemed to do things together in the family.

That is fine, that is wonderful.

Christina: It was good. But then after five years of the nut shops they weren't doing so well, so we sold the deli, we sold the nut shops and I started to do baking.

How did that come about?

Christina: Well we were so much in debt, to buy a business already established you need money, and my borrowing power wasn't there, so I thought I [would] just make some *μακαλαβάδες* [baklavas] and some spanakopita to [make] a living.

Baking from home?

Christina: Baking from home. I did it for nearly two years.

And who did you supply?

Christina: I supplied various cafés, delis, David Jones, Foodlands, and then I decided that I should really get a health inspector in, to see if I was doing the right thing at home. And he said "No, I couldn't do that". So I [rented] a little butcher shop on Main North Road that had a cool room. I started baking there, then that grew a little bit small for us, well we grew and that didn't, so then I started off on Magill Road, and I called it Greek Pastries, and that is where I worked until I retired.

And what did you sell in that shop?

Christina: We sold spinach [spanakopita], all traditional Greek food and sweets. Biscuits.

And it became a very well-known shop.

Christina: It has, yes.

And you supplied other places as well as selling from the shop?

Christina: Of course. The same as what I started, right through. I had the same customers right through.

How would you describe your life generally in business, other than a lot of work obviously. You did it through personal satisfaction.

Christina: Yes because I enjoyed it, and it was something that I knew how to do well, having not had any education. It was something that I taught myself through all the different people, working through shops, Hotel Australia, I learnt a little bit about food, Con's Continental in the market, about all the continental food, through my mum's baking at home, putting it all together came out as Greek Pastries.

All you need now is a Greek cookbook.

Christina: And I am working on it.

That is not bad for a little seven year old from Cyprus who didn't speak English.

Christina: Plus I did some teaching at Regency TAFE. For fifteen years I taught Greek sweets.

Isn't that wonderful.

Christina: In the mean time the children got married, and they had children, and we looked after grandchildren, we looked after parents and we managed to carve a life of how we felt best for ourselves.

Tell me, did you send your children to Greek school?

Christina: I did try because I thought it was important, but they just weren't right into it. My second son would come home crying and I thought "No, it's no good", but they learnt a little bit as they [went] through life.

What about the grandchildren, do they speak Greek?

Christina: A few of them do. Out of seven, I think I have three that speak a little bit of Greek.

They don't speak the language, your children or your grandchildren very much, but have they maintained the Greek culture?

Christina: Oh they love the culture.

And the food?

Christina: Of course, γιαγιάς [grandma's] food is always the best food. It's a bit sad because we didn't know enough about life then, like we do now, but you know they learn things on their own as well.

Mira, you went to school here once you came of age.

Mira: Yes I did go to school. I went to Adelaide Girl's High. I did first and second year high school and then because Christina had married and had to leave the shop because she was expecting a baby, I had to leave school and go to work in the shop with dad. But I was really upset because all I wanted to do was have an education and become a teacher. And it just wasn't going to happen. I just accepted it, even though I didn't want to leave, I had to do what needed to be done and that was leave school.

Well back in those days, we didn't question it, did we.

Mira: No.

Mum and dad said one things, and that was it, we accepted it.

Mira: That was it.

So how long did you work in your dad's shop?

Mira: I worked from the time I was thirteen and a half till I got married, when I was twenty.

And once you got married, obviously you moved on with your husband and did you go into business yourselves?

Mira: We didn't straight away because we lived too far away for me to get to the shop, so I went and worked at Clark's shoes and I became a machinist there, and I hated it.

But that was OK, because then when I was having a baby I left. My husband was working at Chrysler's on the line and we could see that nothing much was going to happen, so he left Chrysler's and went to work for Castelloy's which gave us a bit more money, [but it was a] much more dangerous job. It was very hard work for him. In Cyprus my husband had been a bricklayer. He had worked for the English at one of the English bases and because he was under age they'd hide him, so technically he did not work for the British, he worked for some Cyprian, he probably under paid him but he learnt the trade of a bricklayer. When he came here he had no [writing] skills, couldn't read or write English, so after a while he decided that he would leave and he would have a go at bricklaying. In the early '70s bricklaying was booming in Adelaide and he'd get a job and then they would give him the sack because he couldn't read the plans. Then he met this lovely chap who taught him how to read plans. He stayed with him, [eventually] he got his own licence and he was bricklaying.

How long did he do the bricklaying for?

Mira: He did bricklaying, on and off, in between us getting shops, until he retired and still now he is not really retired because we have a take-away shop with our children. But the last time he did some bricklaying was probably five or six years ago.

So did you work in shops all the way through as well with your husband?

Mira: Yes I did work with him in the shops. We got a fruit shop, we didn't know [at the time] that Castle Plaza was going up not long after and we did not do well. That is what made Mark decide to go to bricklaying and I stayed in the shop. We had the two girls, so that was a bit hard, his sister helped us mind them because mum was a bit far and we only had one car. So while he was learning bricklaying in Australia I was in the shop and then eventually we got rid of the shop, we sold it for next to nothing. Then the bricklaying was better so I stayed home, brought up the kids. I did some art classes, because I always enjoyed doing art. I was a stay-at-home mum, for quite a few years. But while I was home, I did my art, I also did sewing, I learnt how to sew, and I started sewing for a living.

From home?

Mira: From home. In those days it was easier, there was a lot of manufacturing, you would look in the paper, get a job, ring them up and you would do work at home. I met some really interesting characters.

So did you have customers coming to you or did you sew for -----

Mira: Did both. Then in about 1979, 1980 we started sewing professionally with my sister-in-law, my husband's sister --- (Dog barking - a break in recording)

Continuing with Mira. Now you were talking about your dressmaking, and I asked you if you were just dressmaking for ladies at home or were you sewing for other fashion houses?

Mira: Yes I was doing both. I had gone to the Kensington Park College and did a Dressmaking and Patternmaking course, and that's what made me get on to sewing, because I thought it was a good way to be home, earn money and look after the kids. Mum was living around the corner, because we had moved near mum. I had my third child by then, and mum would have them the two afternoons that I would go to college for sewing.

How long did you do this for?

Mira: Until I went to do law.

Did you have a shop, that you sold your sewing at all?

Mira: We had a place called 'M & M Stitch' in Hutt Street and we had that with my husband's sister but while we had that my husband got sick, he got cancer, and we didn't want to renew the lease, because we didn't know what was going to happen so we ended up sewing at my sister-in-law's. So we kept the business going but we did it from home. We stayed together for two or three years, then we split up, she remained at her house sewing and I was sewing at my premises at home.

It sounds like you did a lot of sewing, you never thought of opening up a shop to sell?

Mira: I did. I opened up two. I opened *Bambini of Adelaide* in the Mitcham Shopping Centre in 1985.

So you made and sold baby clothes.

Mira: Yes I made and sold children's clothes and I also bought in, so I sold a lot of the brands that were Australian made and in those days there were restrictions on imports so it was really good. We had a really good mix of Australian clothes as well as the home made stuff, and after I had that for a while I opened up *Kids at the Bay* at Glenelg. We did the same things and I ended up selling both businesses, not for much I should admit, goodwill wasn't going very well then, even though the shops were doing alright. I sold them because my daughter had married a boy from Greece and we needed to do something work-wise. So once we sold the two businesses we actually

bought a cousin's take-away shop and all the family worked in that, including me. We had that for about three or four years.

With the migrant families, it is very common, isn't it for the father or the man of the house to start work in the factory but then go into business. Why, in your case, do you think, it was important for you, the whole family to work together in a business rather than work for somebody else?

Christina: I really think Helen, that it was the way we saw our parents living, in shops and that was what we were very confident in doing. So we involved the whole family, that way we spent time with our families, and we were working. On the weekend I would work with two of the oldest children, and my husband on the Sunday, would work with the other two. We shared the work between all the family and so we had a reasonably good living out of them.

It was more financially rewarding, wasn't it?

Christina: Of course and we didn't hire a lot of people then, it was mainly only shops and work that we could do ourselves. It was only as we got older that we got into hiring help and doing that, otherwise it was just the family thing.

Mira: There was also an element of pride in running your own business, you had more control of your life and you could see, maybe because from where we came from, that if you worked for someone you would always have to do what that person told you. It was like renting a property, you were going to be at someone's whim as to the control of your life, but by taking control yourself of a business you could actually dictate how your life was going to run, and you had some, just some type of say in what was going to happen to you and your family.

Yes that is very true. You said previously that you decided to start Law. What brought that on?

Mira: I didn't actually want to do Law, I actually just wanted an education. I had always wanted to be a teacher and a neighbour had told me that even though I had not finished high school - I'd only done two years - that you could go to university. I had said to her that I was just going to go to do some TAFE courses and when she said that anyone could go [to university], you didn't have to finish [high school], I put an application in and did the Foundation course at Flinders. While I was doing it they said that you could apply for anything to get into Uni but they would only take five people for Law, and that was just like a bit of a challenge and I thought well I'll try for that, and I got in.

Well done.

Mira: And I really enjoyed studying.

Did you study full time?

Mira: I did because I thought at my age, I shouldn't really do it part time, and my daughters started having children and it was probably good, because I think that if I did it part-time I may not have finished, I would have wanted to mind the grandchildren.

So how long was the course:

Mira: Four and a half years

Now after four and a half years, was it your aim, to actually get a job as a lawyer?

Mira: I don't even know what I thought, because I didn't ever think I was going to finish it, and then when I did finish, I knew that I had to get a job, we weren't well off. I found that my age was against me for a job, but I got an interview and became an Associate in the District Court.

You did very well.

Mira: That part was ok, and then I found out that you had to actually speak in front of people which terrified me but I was in there then, and I knew that I had to do it and so I stayed at the courts for 27 months. They allow you normally two years, but I had approached them if I could stay a bit longer to get my practicing certificate, which they did allow me. I did work for a few months in Family Law, but I found that was too emotional for me. So I left and I started my own Law practice, a very limited small Law Practice [as a sole trader working] from home, just dealing with Succession Law and Conveyancing.

That is wonderful, and you obviously enjoy it.

Mira: I enjoy it because I work from home, I can still mind my grandchildren, I can help my kids out which is my first priority, my children and my grandchildren.

That is wonderful. Christina have you been back to your village in Cyprus?

Christina: Yes I have been twice.

The first time you went back there what did you think you would find when you went there?

Christina: Having been told so many stories from my mum, I more or less knew what I was going to expect, it was not like Adelaide. The language was a little bit hard, because even though I could speak Greek it's quite common for us Australian brought

up Greeks, to throw in an English word here and there so when I did that, when I went to Cyprus, they sort of looked at me as if I had two heads. But I had my husband that was always explaining to them, that I could speak Greek, but you know instead of saying 'yard' in Greek I would say [γιάρι] 'yard' in conversation and they would say "What was that?" It was good to see all the relatives, and because I had my husband with me, I didn't have to sort of wait for anyone to take me around or anything like that.

Was there any emotional feeling when you went back?

Christina: Oh yes, it was lovely to see mum's house and it brought back some memories, and a lot of the relatives, the places that mum talked about. It was good, that when I came back and she talked about the people, the places, you knew what they looked like, because being so young I couldn't remember.

Did you find that when you went there though, that you felt that you went back to something, like a feeling you had been here before.

Christina: Not like I had been there before, I went there and I liked it but I couldn't stay there.

You didn't feel it was your country.

Christina: No not at all. Which was sad.

So when you left Cyprus and came back home to Adelaide, you didn't mind coming back to all, you were not saying goodbye to anything in particular.

Christina: Oh no, no. We did want to go back, I did go with my sisters in 2002 and that was different again.

Why?

Christina: Because I was with the group of girls, we didn't just go to relatives, we went and saw all the historical places.

So you went on a real holiday?

Christina: On a real holiday yes. I was going to go back again but I never got around to it.

Mira, the first time you went back to Cyprus.

Mira: The first time I went back I absolutely loved it. Not to live there, but I loved it. I loved the quaintness of it, I loved everything I could remember from what mum said. The people in our village, women were still sitting in the street, either just chatting or doing bits of embroidery, it was just as I imaged it would be. You'd walk past, and they

had to stop you and ask you who you were, where you came from. There was this really nice friendliness. If you went to the shops in the town, they would always offer the kids a cool drink and offer you a coffee even before you bought anything. So there was this real old-world village country life which was just beautiful. I loved seeing the relatives, my husband has a big family there, so, it was great seeing all of that. There were a lot of things I didn't like about it. I thought a woman was still a little bit different there, still your opinion wasn't really that important, even though there were women in high jobs, but not that many in 1980. I must say I absolutely loved Cyprus then. Didn't love it so much in 2001.

Why?

Mira: It had changed. It had progressed a lot. It was progression I felt wasn't a great one. I thought it was sort of sad to see, they had maids, live-in maids. You now after all we are all just village people.

And they had maids in the village?

Mira: Yes

What nationality were these maids?

Mira: They were from Sri Lanka or other countries. Now they even have Asian ones. But what I found sad was they had the maids and I sort of couldn't understand the reason behind it, because, I thought here you would be happy to work, whereas there they felt, there were things that they thought were beneath them. Sort of letting go of your roots.

But obviously though they were in a better situation than they were when you left because they could afford to pay for this.

Mira: Yes they were very well off financially. Financially they would have been at the peak then. It was probably the beginning of what may be classed as financial downturn, because apparently the money they were paying the [overseas] maids was going out of the country to finance the maid's family, because a lot of times the workers would be women with a few children and they would go and work for two or three years. So they were going to go back, there was no way they were going to spend money, so any money they were earning would go out of the country. I don't know whether that has actually impacted on what has happened recently in Cyprus, but I think it might not have helped the situation at all.

No, well with the money going out of course, they would not have spent it in there.

Mira: I last went seven months ago. I didn't mind it but each time I go and I don't know if I will ever go again, I just feel, yes it is lovely and we've got family there, but it is so lovely to come back home. I know that Adelaide is home.

That is what I was about to say. It isn't home any more is it?

Mira: No. I don't think to me, because I couldn't remember it, I don't think it was ever home, but there was something that drew you because you know that, that was the land you came from.

It is your mother country isn't it.

Mira: And our history is exciting, and I think that is it, but to say it is home, I think it would be very hard to say it. I love our culture, I love our religion, I love everything Greek that our parents have given us and I love the way our parents brought us up, even though a lot of people wouldn't like it. I think we had a great up-bringing. I will remember our mother's stories on Saturday nights, her folk stories, she was a great entertainer and while we didn't have material things I think we had a really rich childhood.

I think it was happier, it was simpler, and more trustworthy. You know in the evenings you weren't worried about leaving your house unlocked.

Mira: We would sleep outside.

There you are. It was very very different, and this is now what we call 'progress', but that is how it was. I want to go back to when you first came to Australia with your mum and four children. You may not remember Mira, but perhaps you do Christina, was mum happy about leaving Cyprus and coming to a foreign country?

Christina: She was happy to have her family with her, but she missed Cyprus a lot. She told me once that anywhere she ever heard the language, when she went to buy anything from the local shops, and she heard someone talking in Greek she would cry because she missed the language and the things she had in Cyprus. Although her family was here and she crafted a life for herself here with her family, she missed a lot of her extended family over there.

Her heart was still in Cyprus wasn't it. That was her mother country. Did she ever have the opportunity to go back?

Christina: She went a couple of times.

The first time she went back, you children were still young, but do you remember how she felt about going back home?

Christina: Oh yes, she was very excited and she came back with lots of stories for us. Actually I was married and Mira was married too, so she took the two younger children, Barbara and Peter. It was before the Turkish invasion, and so they went all over Cyprus, and she loved it, because her sister came from England as well and they met in Cyprus together.

So then when mum came back to Australia, how did she feel, did she feel she had two countries?

Christina: She did and she kept in touch with everyone Helen. She would remember everyone she met on her trip and she would ring everyone she came in contact. When it was a name day, if any of their children were getting married, if anyone was sick, she would ring everyone and tell them to go and visit them. She just wanted to keep the way she lived over there, she wanted to keep it alive here as well.

Did she learn to speak English?

Christina: She spoke a little bit for someone [who] never worked out [of the home], and she taught herself how to read. She would read and do cross word puzzles.

Was she involved in any of the businesses?

Christina: She wasn't involved in dad's business but she was involved with the Cyprian Society and she was the President for the Cyprian Society.

So she was involved in the community quite a bit.

Christina: Yes and she always wrote poems for them. Any special events of the Greek Orthodox religion, where we have our certain Saint's days, she would write poems for that day and she worked tirelessly for when the Turks invaded Cyprus.

What did she do?

Christina: They would collect clothes and food and send them to Cyprus. There was a committee here, and they would send them to Sydney first and then Sydney would have parcels going over to Cyprus.

To help the people over in Cyprus.

Christina: And everyone that donated everything, she with a group of ladies of course, she would go through everything and they would pick out the best and send it over there.

That is all the questions that I have got, but have either of you two have anything else to add.

Mira: Speaking about mum, when Cyprus was invaded, she wrote, she was always writing things, she wrote a beautiful poem about the *πρόσφυγες*, the refugees and it got published in the Greek paper for her and you know she was really moved and that's what made her --- Mum instigated this money raising thing, she was really active. She was in her mid fifties when Cyprus was invaded, and she worked tirelessly for that. They raised a lot of money for Cyprus. Her love of reading, she wasn't backwards in speaking in front of lots of people, so she was really happy to speak on the radio. Even till today people will talk to us and say "We miss your mum not talking anymore on the radio". I think it brought her joy too, because she didn't actually have to move from home. All the children were told "Don't ring 7 o'clock on a Tuesday night" because that's when she talked on the radio. They would ring her from the radio station and she would tell them Bible stories, or something that she had read, she was very interested in medical issues. She would have been one of the only Greek woman of her age that could actually tape things from the TV and then tape it again to give her friends. In the beginning she'd tape things and she'd keep a record and if she lent say her friend Helen something, she'd book mark down what she had given Helen, but then when she gave too many, it was too much and she stopped doing it. She loved all that and she loved to keep all the Greekness around her. She was just an amazing woman. I think we were really lucky.

I take it that she probably did not go to school, for her age.

Mira: No. Mum, I think did two years of school and she taught herself to read.
(Dog barking so break in recording)

Continuing on with Mira and Christina.

Now Mira you were talking about your mum.

Mira: Well mum was very passionate, she was artistic, she was creative, very much ahead of her time. When mum passed away there was an article written about her in the paper. If you don't mind I'll just read a little bit from it. *"Maria was born the oldest of six children in Aradippou when it was under British rule. The girls in the village had little or no schooling and Maria went to school for just two to three years. She had a passion for learning and was artistic and self educated through learning Biblical Tomes and whatever was available to expand her knowledge. She would listen to the village story tellers and poets until she memorised their stories and poems. Her father sold hand-embroidered fabric, doilies and bedspreads throughout the island and began*

exporting to Palestine, at the time as it was known. As Maria's creativity blossomed, she designed and sketched the embroidery and managed her father's business". So I think we had a great heritage from our mother, in her creativeness, from our father we all got hard work and I just think we are really lucky.

You are, aren't you. Christina, is there anything else you would like to add to finish off today.

Christina: Yes, thank you. Going back to mum again, I got all my cooking skills, my passion for being with people, like she had. I love helping someone in need and plus cooking, and I'm very passionate about her knowledge and family life.

You both though sound that you have taken a lot from both your mother and your father.

Christina: Yes.

Different degrees obviously, but it has been wonderful, and a lovely lifestyle, with all the children together. And again once more, I thank you very much for taking part in this project.

Christina: Thank you for having us Helen.

Mira: Our pleasure.