

**This is an interview with Ioannis (Yiani) Athanasiadis on Sunday the 8th September 2013 at his home in the Stuart Range Caravan and Tourist Park in the opal mining town of Coober Pedy in the centre of South Australia.**

**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 Yiani and thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed.**

Thank you.

**Can you please give me for the record your full name.**

My name is Yiani Athanasiadis.

**And where and when were you born Yiani?**

I was born in north Greece, Kozani on 19th eighth '43.

**And your parents were they originally from Kozani, both of them?**

No they [were] born in Turkey and they came to Greece in 1922.

**Is that with the population exchange after World War I?**

Yes, yes, they did.

**Do you remember, did they ever say to you how they got from Asia Minor or Turkey to Kozani?**

That was a big story actually they had a very hard time. A lot of them were lost on their way to Greece and of course everybody I think, knows that, some they made it some they didn't. So finally my parents they land in Greece.

**It was a very hard time for them wasn't it?**

Very hard. Of course they had nothing, they left with no clothes, no money, they came in the middle of nowhere and everyone can mention how hard time they had.

**And they had to start from scratch.**

From scratch.

**Now in Kozani what did you parents do for a living?**

My father was very healthy [comfortable] moneywise. He started a joinery sort of workshop and he was the only one in that area so we were one of the lucky kids out of the others. We didn't have millions but a good living.

**It was a good living. And what about your mum what did she do in the village or in the town?**

She was one of the poorest girl at that time but luckily she married my father so she was successful after that.

**And how many children did your parents have?**

We are six of us, two girls, four boys.

**Where do you fit in, first, last, in the order?**

Middle.

**You are in the middle. Did you go to school in Kozani?**

Yes I did. Those years [were] very hard. The schools wasn't --- most of the families could not afford to send the kids to school because there wasn't any high schools in the villages, you had to move to the closest city, to rent a house and things like this, so I was one of the lucky ones and actually I was [in] a private high school. Those years very few kids could make that. I was one of them but I wouldn't say I was stupid, but I was a little bit cheeky so I didn't finish the high school. But still those years I was better than any other kid.

**You were very lucky weren't you?**

I was, yes I was.

**So when you went to this private school was it in Kozani?**

No in Ptolemaida.

**And how far away was that from your home?**

It was about 15ks.

**Did you go there every day and back?**

No we used to live there.

**So you boarded in the school?**

We rented a house and every weekend we used to go home.

**Did all the children go to the same school?**

No only me. I was the lucky one.

**Very lucky. What do you remember about your childhood, growing up?**

We didn't have the facilities kids have [today]. As I said I was a bit lucky, I had a push bike. In those years no one of the kids used to have and I used to eat in a restaurant once, twice a week, which not one of the kids used to do that. At the end when I grew up I started appreciating what I had, when I was there I thought it was nothing. Anyway, I was one of the lucky kids.

**So you had a good childhood.**

Very very, I was the spoilt one out of the six kids.

**There must have been a reason for that.**

I don't know.

**So when you decided that you didn't want to go to school anymore, what did you do?**

Then I moved to Germany for a few years, a little kid 17-18 years old. I was very healthy [comfortable] moneywise, I was better than the other people in the town but still we were poor.

**You were still poor.**

Yes. I didn't have no suitcase with me.

**When you went to Germany?**

To Germany. So I went there, of course I didn't have the brains to save money, I had a good life and then after a few years I came back to Greece. I joined the army and then I grew up a bit more and I realised I made a mistake in Germany. I was working and spending all the money so then I decided to come to Australia.

**Why did you go to Germany?**

Because that was the closest one, the closest country I can go and my friends went there so, with my friends it was a good experience in my life, because I didn't want to go to school anymore, so I had to do something. In Greece, as you know, it was very poor.

**It was a hard time in Greece at the time that you were there. So we have come back to Greece, you did national service for two years.**

Yes I did.

**And then after that - at what age did you finish national service?**

I was 23.

**You were 23 and you decided, on your own that you were leaving for Australia?**

Yes, [at] that time they used to have they called it DEME, the Australian sort of a ---

**It was assisted passage and it was the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration and helped a lot of Greeks and other Europeans to come to Australia.**

Thousands. So I applied for it, I put my name down, and then the same time I was healthy, because you have to go through [medical examination].

**Medical examinations. What were they looking for?**

Well if you got any serious illnesses and if you was healthy enough, and if you were good enough to use a pick and shovel. The first thing they checked was my hands.

**Interesting.**

Yes that was fun.

**So did you have calluses on your hands?**

Yes.

**You did?**

Yes I used to. But all my life after Germany my mind was on business.

**You wanted to make money.**

Yes and the mistakes I made in Germany, that was a good lesson for the rest of my life. I never did that again, so when I came to Australia I was one of the good workers.

**Were you the first in your family to come to Australia?**

No. My sister, eldest one, she came in 1955.

**One of the first ones here. How did she come here?**

[With] her husband, together.

**So you had somebody to come to.**

Yes, and then my sister took my other two brothers, then they took my other sister, the little one. My little sister, went back for a holiday, she married and she never came back again.

**She stayed in Greece.**

My older sister [also], after she had her pension she moved to Greece, to retire there.

**What did your parents think of you, all the children leaving?**

Well one way they were worrying, the other way they were happy because we were very successful in Australia. They were happy that their kids had a good life. In one way it was hard, the other way they were happy.

**It was very difficult for migrants back then wasn't it?**

It was.

**So the decision was made for you to come to Australia. What ship did you come across on.**

It was named Patris.

**There were many Greeks on that ship?**

A lot, a lot.

**Other nationalities as well or just Greek?**

At that time it was a lot of Greeks moving here so it was all Greeks and then later they started getting less and less Greeks and they used to have other nationalities too on it.

**You took about a month, or ships used to take about a month to ---**

Thirty seven days.

**Can you remember the thirty seven days on the ship? What are your memories?**

Well I do want to remember because that was the best time I ever had in my life. I was young, plenty girls, good life, no work, plenty food, so it was --- I'll never forget that.

**You had a good time?**

A very good time.

**So your first port of call in Australia was Fremantle?**

Yes.

**So when you arrived in Fremantle what did you think of Australia then?**

Well, because I had been to Germany I get used to the other countries sort of ---  
Everybody else [on the ship] of course it was [their] first time out of Greece, and they were looking very funny, but for me it wasn't much different.

**So from Fremantle you went to Port Melbourne and then from there the authorities took you all to Bonegilla is that correct?**

I couldn't go to Bonegilla because I came with the government contract, but anybody had any other people here, relatives and things, they could move out of the ship, straight to the family.

**So even though you had an assisted passage you didn't have to go to Bonegilla.**

You didn't have to. They were happy if you found your own way in Australia, so less expenses for them.

**So your plan was, with the assisted passage to come here work for two years and go back or did you say that I am going to Australia and that's it?**

If I was talking to other friends that we came together, and other Greeks I knew, 95% they used to say "I am going to make a few dollars and go back". I never thought about that, never, I came here and I put plans down and I say "That's going to be my country and I have to establish here". And that was one of the best things I ever did, so I never thought about Greece, make money and spend there. I extend my money all in Australia, so that was very good for me future.

**That was your driving force to succeed.**

Yes

**So once you came here what did you do in Melbourne?**

When I came to Australia I was lucky. My brother was a builder, the only problem was he was in Greece when I came here, and I started as a painter. My first stop was Horsham in Victoria, so I did six months painting and I saved \$600.

**A lot of money then.**

Those years was a lot of money, but because we worked in the bush, they used to feed us, accommodation for us, I had no expenses, only smoking and a few drinks. So after my brother came back we started building together, I mean he was a builder, I was working for him and then he decided to go to Coober Pedy, because he had been to Coober Pedy before I came to Australia. As soon as he left from Melbourne, I had

nothing else to do because I didn't know anybody else, so I started a Pizza Bar. Unusual for Greeks but anyway I had an Italian boy, he teach me the first step but because I was a very hard worker the shop I started was very successful. I sold the shop, the first one, I bought one house, and thanks to the Australian government, the banks, straight away, without knowing me, they gave me a loan and as soon as I sold the first Pizza Bar I bought another one. An empty shop, I built it up, it was good again, I sold that and I bought a shop site, so that was my start. Then I started a third one, so then I sold the third one, it was very tiring seven days a week, and long hours. [At] the same time I had been married, and I said to my wife with two kids, a daughter and son, "Let's go to Coober Pedy and visit George, my brother". So we came to Coober Pedy. It was a little town in the middle of nowhere, there weren't many facilities here, but that was something different. As soon as I stepped in Coober Pedy my brother asked me to join them in the mining, to work with them because they were three partners, and to work in mining, on the drill. They bought a Coldwell drill, they had to be two and one offsider, one of course operator. To work underground you have to be two, safe [safety] wise, so I started with them, just to try, but if I tell you the truth, it was my best life, because there was not many hours of working, and after work I used to go home, have a shower eat, go to the pub. Beautiful life. So I was only spending money, because I didn't have a share on the drill. So if I would find opal I would get my share. So I was nearly broke. The first dollar I found was after five years.

**So you were mining for five years before you found any opal?**

Five years before I found a dollar. I was just about ready to move out and one day my brother came home, he drilled a shaft, he finds opal, so that was good. It holds me back and as soon as we finish the mining I work out the money I found, that was just about enough to cover the money I had lost. Everybody calls me the lucky miner because I run out of money, I never liked gambling, and opal mining is the biggest gambling. If you do find, you are alright, you make millions, if you don't you lose whatever you have. So instead [of going] back to Melbourne and start another Pizza Bar --- The Pizza Bar [that] was in Coober Pedy shuts down because it didn't make alright. So I start a Pizza Bar and I get out of mining. So the shop as usual was very good shop, very successful, and like everybody when you work in one job all your life, you get sick of it. So I was thinking to make something different. At that time they started to seal the main road, Stuart Highway, from Port Augusta to Alice Springs and I thought, maybe I

was smart, maybe it was a big jump, I thought if that road is sealed there will be a lot of vans passing through, and that is the only road, the centre of Australia. So I decided to spend the money and make a caravan park, because there were not enough facilities in Coober Pedy. There were little ones, thirty five powered sites at that time. So I bought, actually I had the block of land through the council, that was on tender, the block of land. There were 22 of us applied for it so through the bank I had the best results of money. They had to get written guarantee how much money you have and how much you were going to spend, so I was the most successful, so I was lucky so they gave it to me. I have a beautiful business, I spend all my life in that caravan park so I make money, but I haven't got a life. One way lucky, one way not.

**But you enjoy it here, you enjoy life here.**

I do, that's my baby now.

**Let's go back now. When you originally came to Coober Pedy with your family you came just to have a look.**

That is right, visit.

**But it became a very long visit and what about your family, after a while, your wife and children, did they want to stay here?**

Well my kids they were one year old and five years old, very little ones, and my wife is always with me. We were a very good team and she didn't mind to move from here to Melbourne or anywhere else. What is the difference, we moved from Greece here, what is the difference, Melbourne or Adelaide, so long as we are in Australia.

**Exactly, so long as you are together and in Australia as you said and you were successful.**

I had no problems with my family.

**That was good. Now can you tell us very briefly in '73 when you were here in Coober Pedy how did you mine the opal, what was the process?**

That was a good question. When I started, I started by pick and shovel and they used to do the shafts by hand. Later I worked bigger shovel with explosives, there wasn't many machines in those years.

**What dynamite?**

Dynamite, explosives the same thing actually, so that was the most dangerous part of work, going mining, because one of the miners had to be in the shaft to dig, fill up the



buckets, they had hand winches on the top and a little mistake from the top the bottom miner was gone. So we used to have a lot of accidents. Today they are all with machines and actually 99.9[%] they use tunnelling machines, which is no explosives at all, no dynamite.

**So how does it work, tell us briefly.**

It is expensive project. You have to have two engines, one to run the generator, because the tunnelling machines they should not have any fumes underneath, so they run by electricity. So one engine for the generator has to be over 50 kva generator so that means a big engine, and one engine for the fan, the fan is actually a vacuum machine, it sucks the dirt from the bottom to the top. So he makes it very easy, no buckets, to picks. The only time you use a pick is to dig the level to take the opal out. So you pick the opal from the bottom, but when you are picking opal you don't mind if you use a pick because you play with a lot of money, so you don't even think about it.

**You can see it. How far down, how deep do you go?**

It all depends [on] the area, of course, I don't know if the people know. The sandstone creates the opal, the silica of the sandstone. The first thing they do when they are drilling they are looking for sandstone if they go in a new area. So if they find sandstone, it means there is opal somewhere, and then after that they [are] looking for the levels, the layer. The opal is only in that level and [at] some areas the level is 5 feet, 10 feet, some areas goes up to 100 feet. It all depends on the area. Some areas do not have sandstone at all. We work at different depth.

**So once you get to a particular level do you do any tunnelling as well?**

So what you do is as soon as you finish drilling you go down with a light and you check if you have levels. If you do have levels, levels means a dark line and has different colour to the rest of the ground so you can tell straight away it is a level. As soon as you find that, you check to is if there is any opal in there and that is --- the opal is just luck. You may drill a shaft and you may miss the opal by one foot. So as soon as you find that, you find opal, you go down, you have to put explosives, dynamite, even now. What you do is you keep the level above your head so you have to put the explosives below the level so you make the tunnel high enough so you can walk straight and you keep your level above your head so as soon as you do that, you make

enough space for the machine, you open it, then you put the machine down with a crane.

**How big is the initial drill hole that you make?**

The normal shafts are between 33 to 36 inches diameter. Big enough to go up and down and put the pipes from the machine in. If you want to use tunnelling machine you have to put extensions on the top of the bucket of the drill and you rim the shaft. The shaft has to be over five feet, so one car easy can fit in. So big shafts, [are] very dangerous. But we never use big shafts to go up and down. Always we make a normal shaft next to it and we connect it from underneath. So we go up and down from the small shaft and we put the pipe from the big shaft and we continue from there.

**That's an awful lot of work.**

It is, it is a big job.

**And how do you select the area that you drill to begin with?**

When you go in a new area. Usually [the miners] that have the drills, because they are drilling, it costs them nothing. Because to hire a drill today it will cost you [for] every shaft over \$400-\$500. So [when] the new drillers go in the new areas they are drilling, all the other miners they keep an eye on him. As soon as he finds opal they peg around him, a claim, because every miner is allowed to peg one claim, so he can't peg the whole area. The opal is not everywhere. Opal is just luck, you can't tell from the top where is a good area or a bad area, so that is what they do. So they follow the drillers and they know somewhere is a big patch of opal.

**So do you need a license to drill?**

Well to do mining you have to be a miner.

**A qualified miner?**

No doesn't need, so long as you get the Miners Rights we call them, they are four little plastic number plates. So you have to go to the Mines Department, you apply for this and that will take an hour and they give you four little plastic number plates with a number on it and you put them on four pegs and you go anywhere you want to peg a claim. The claims, they are two sizes one is 50 x 50 metres, the other one is 50 x 100 metres. So you are allowed to peg one out of those two sizes at a time. The only difference is of course when you peg a claim, you are allowed to keep the claim for

fourteen days for free, after that if you want to continue you have to register the claim. The difference is on the rego price, if you register a claim, the small one will cost you around \$160 a year, the big one is of course double price. If you do find opal you have to renew them every year. The same as the Miners Rights.

**So we have pegged our claim, you have dug down and you find opal, who are the buyers?**

We have a lot of buyers from overseas, they come from America, China, the most of them are from China actually, Canada, Germany, from everywhere, and we sell the opal, 95% rough. They clean it up and there are different categories, first class, second class, third class so you put the price, you call the opal buyer, the deal is very short, doesn't matter how big the opal is and you sell it to the overseas.

**You would have seen some very successful miners, and some would have dug, and as you said, five years it took you before you found your first one, but also you would have seen some miners who made a lot of money and lost it.**

That was the biggest problem, that's why I run out of mining. That was a good lesson for me. All the miners kept telling me "I find big money and I was stupid I didn't extend my money, buying properties" because they used to sell the opal, black money, cash money, put under the bed, good life, casinos, holidays, women and they thought they would find again, but luck is not every day. A lot of them came as young boys here to make future with big dreams, make a family, and they finish on scratch with no family and nobody. That was the worst part of the miners.

**That is the problem with mining towns isn't it.**

Well if they haven't got brains they have problems. I didn't have that problem.

**But you decided that you didn't want that life, and you invested your money and as you said previously, you thought that with the sealing of the Stuart Highway a caravan [park] would be a good idea and so you bought your 20 acres virtually on the Stuart Highway and you built a caravan [park]. Did you move away from mining altogether?**

That is a big problem. Mining is a very funny game. It is very exciting game, it gets in my blood. Still I dream about it, but because I know it is risky, I do a bit for a hobby, I've got all the machinery, sitting [there] \$70,000, and I work maybe one or two weeks a year. Still I love it.

**So it is still in your blood?**

Oh yes, it is, it is.

**Now with the caravan park, it is a magnificent park that you have here, you have extended it and developed it almost like a tourist resort with the onsite vans, the powered sites, you have the cabins, we should not call them cabins now they are little apartments on here, how did you expand so much?**

As we started from scratch --- I am actually a funny person, everybody makes money and they [are] too greedy to spend the money or they take [it] out of Coober Pedy, I am a different person. I love to see what I start to finish it. No one spends money in Coober Pedy, I was the only one, I spent big money in Coober Pedy, whatever I did I spend it back and I am the only one I have four star apartments in Coober Pedy. Thanks to the government, actually they have seen that, they heard that, and because we have a lot of other companies around Coober Pedy, the Public service workers they were expecting better quality of things so I decided to build seven apartments for a start. The government saw that I wanted to extend, upgrade the other rooms I have, another 24 rooms. I didn't have the money so the government actually decided to help me dollar by dollar and they gave me a grant to make the other rooms which I thank them very much. So I am going to extend the other ones too. I want to finish this before I pass away.

**It's a beautiful set up you have here.**

The other way I am lucky, very lucky not many kids hang around with their own parents. My son decided to take over which is good, it will give me a bit of a break, he is actually in charge now and he is going to do the rest of them.

**Good that's wonderful, because did you find that most of the children that grew up in Coober Pedy actually left and went into the cities?**

They did because there isn't much life around here and because they don't want to hang around with their parents as usual, that is everywhere, that is the biggest problem, but I am very lucky.

**You are, you are very lucky. Now let's go back now, when you came here there were many many Greeks working in Coober Pedy and you developed a Greek community.**

We have 42 different nationalities in Coober Pedy, the biggest population was the Greeks. Of course all the nationalities, they have clubs, and also we have the biggest club in Coober Pedy. You are going to tell me, I don't want somebody to come to Coober Pedy and hear this story now, and then they say Yiani didn't say the truth. Even

though it was the biggest population, Greeks have the smallest church in the town and the biggest club in the town, that means anything?

**What does that mean? (laughter)**

They are little bit piss pots actually (laughter) They are funny, everybody laughs about it. They say "Why you didn't spend money on the church and you spend on the club". So yes we have a beautiful club.

**And what other entertainment did you have here within the Greek community? What sort of things did you do?**

Now there are not many left because of the big companies around Coober Pedy, gold and mines, iron, so all the youth they move out, they start working there, they get good money and of course the companies they fly them anywhere they live, anywhere in Australia, so why they should stay in Coober Pedy? They took their kids away they have a better education, better facilities.

**But when you came here in the '70s and a little bit later, when there was a booming industry and the children were much younger, what sort of entertainment was provided or did you provide yourselves for your families. Did you have Greek cinemas, did you have theatres, you had the Glendi didn't you.**

We have a Glendi it was once a year and we had a drive-in and once a week they used to have different nationality films Australian, Greeks, Yugoslavs, Italians, they have different nights. And then we had soccer teams, every nationalities had their own soccer teams and they used to play together. That was our entertainment actually.

**That would have been fun, wouldn't it?**

Oh very good life.

**Tell me within the Greek blood, we are religious, and we need our Greek Orthodox church, when the Greeks came here obviously there was no church but you built a Greek church, can you tell me a bit about how that happened.**

How we built that, actually [it] was going to be built, but the start was when there were very few Greeks here. There was a miner, a young boy, named Nick and unfortunately he was killed mining and his father came to Coober Pedy and he built the little church and he put his name and that is why the church is called St Nicholas. And after, it was going to be extended but it never happened, and still it is a little church, that is how we built the church.

**Does that church have a church service regularly?**

We have a [service] three times a year, St Nicholas [Day], the name of the church and every Christmas and Easter. We have to bring a priest from Adelaide, which is costly.

**So you pay for the travelling?**

We have to pay everything, travelling, him, everything, accommodation.

**So the three times a year it would be wonderful for the church to have a service.**

Yes. Yes. To bring a priest here you have to pay him every week, and so cannot afford that.

**You said that there are other mines in the area as well, that the younger generation can work either from here or from the other cities, what other companies drill for various minerals here?**

Iron of course, a lot of copper, gold, coal.

**And this is all close to Coober Pedy?**

The first one is 130 kms from Coober Pedy and then the next one is about 65 and the last one is 40, they are drilling very close they are finding, they reckon oil, 20 kms. They are four companies around Coober Pedy.

**And with these companies once they find their minerals, how do they get it to port?**

By train, everything they move out by train.

**Down to Port Adelaide?**

Actually they used to go from Port Pirie

**From Port Pirie and then out, overseas.**

I think most goes to China they have a contract with them.

**So would the iron ore be the biggest mining here?**

Yes it is.

**And with those miners, do you know how they work?**

They work two weeks twelve hours a day, one week off. So one week they fly them anywhere they live.

**So the company pays for their transport backwards and forwards as well as their salaries and as well as their accommodation.**

Accommodation, food everything free. The biggest problem for Coober Pedy is they all have a camp, wherever they work they live there. They promised us they were going to stay in Coober Pedy, but nothing happened. Coober Pedy used to be over 5,000 population, today it's not even half. Opal miners, they're getting less every year, because all the youth no one works in opal mining.

**But as you said it's a bit of a gamble, you don't know if you are going to find anything or not. Now you have these workers coming in for the mines for two weeks on and one week off. What about in Coober Pedy, in the city in the town, you said you have the public servants that come here and work and they want accommodation, so that is why you are expanding your caravan park. Is it the same for these people, do they come in for short periods of time, to work say in the bank or in the offices?**

Not the big companies, but, what is happening, Coober Pedy is the centre of the South Australian desert and of course all the Public Service is in Coober Pedy, so the whole area, Coober Pedy area they have service from here, bank, post office, telstra, highway depot, TAFE, welfare, family, but they are all in Coober Pedy, so that keeps the town going. So they are in and out.

**So these are the people that want accommodation that you're building at the moment.**

Yes yes

**You talked about TAFE you have an Area school here in Coober Pedy?**

Of course we have, beautiful Area school, state school and high school and we have about 250 kids in the school, which for a small town is a lot.

**And you also have TAFE. What does your TAFE here specialise in?**

Specialises in opal cutting course, so it is the only TAFE in Australia having an opal cutting course.

**So does that mean that you get students from overseas coming as well as Australian students.**

I didn't see, very few from overseas, but we have a lot of people from other states they come here. It is a six months course, to learn about cutting opal and work on opal.

**Being here for such a long time were you able to get involved in local government at all?**

Well I loved doing it because you know what is going on around, and I love the town, I want to help the town, I had been in the council as a councillor and now I am getting

older my son is in. My son is the third term now. I did four years and I was in the Greek club involved in the committee.

**So you were in the Greek community association as well. When we drove in here, we noticed, you are on Stuart Highway but you turn into Yianikas Drive, how did that come about.**

When people used to come in Coober Pedy and they started mining, whenever any miner was going in a new area he used to put his name because every area has, say Olympic field, that happens in Coober Pedy town as well. A lot of people they used to build their house in one area, as soon as the road was built they put his name. When I built the caravan park, they had to make the road so I can come into the park. The council was very busy so they told me "If you fill up the road, make it ready for sealing, we are going to seal it for you", because they were very busy. I did all that, I paid most of [the] cost, and then the time comes for the name. They asked me "What name do you want us to put"? I said "Did David build that road or Jack" They said "No, what do you mean?" I said "Did Yiani build this road?" they started laughing, they said "You're right" so they put it Yianikas Drive, my name.

**Why Yianika and not Yiani?**

In Greece if you are a small man, they call you Yianika.

**Small as in short.**

As in short yes, yes. (laughter)

**So everybody knows you as Yianika.**

As Yianika.

**That is really lovely. Did you very go back to Greece?**

You love the place wherever you are born, but not for good. This is my country, I did the most of my life here, I love it. I have been a couple of times, I have relatives there, I have friends, of course you cannot forget that, but not for good.

**You went back for a holiday?**

Yes I did.

**And when you were leaving, you were going back home to Australia. You classify Australia as home?**

Yes yes my country, now my home is Australia.



**Did your parents ever come to Australia to see what you do?**

My mum came, she spent four years with us.

**Here in Coober Pedy?**

Melbourne and here.

**What did she think of Coober Pedy?**

Well she was born in Turkey, grew up in Greece had other kids in Greece, friends there, it was very hard for her. She used to love us, love the country but she couldn't speak English and had no friends around, neighbours, things like this, it was very hard for her. Only us and always she was talking about Greece and Greece. My older sister was in Australia so when she got her pension from Australia, she took mum back and they live now together, they used to live. My mum's passed away. They used to live in Greece, she was very happy there.

**When you came to Australia in '73 - sorry in '67. You came to Coober Pedy in '73. When you came to Australia initially, could you speak English?**

Because I was in the private school in Greece we have a course in English. I couldn't speak properly, I had a lot of words, but it helped me a lot. In a few months I was able to speak.

**That is wonderful, and it is unusual isn't it for a Greek migrant.**

Yes it is, it helped me a lot.

**So now you are here you are extending the caravan park do you intend staying here?**

In Coober Pedy, I love it, I spent half of my life but the truth is wherever my kids go I will be there. It is no point to stay here and my kids are somewhere else. I have three beautiful grandkids.

**Can you see a future here for your grandchildren?**

No not at all, because we are too far away from entertainment, the schools of course they are different, if they want to extend their education, they have to move out Adelaide or wherever.

**And also employment opportunities they wouldn't have here as they would have in the cities.**

Facilities are not the same as you got in the cities.

**But would you keep your business here?**

I love keeping it but how, if my son doesn't continue, what am I going to do? So it is up to him now, what he is going to do.

**If the time comes and you have to sell how will you feel.**

Well the time comes we are going to pass away, you don't feel well, it's the same thing, so it's no choice. So I love it as I said but that is not the end of my life.

**You have a wonderful set up here and I would like to thank you very much for sharing your story with us. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't covered?**

Thank you for the government for sending you here, it gave me the opportunity to say my life and you will do that to somebody else too. It is good for the Greeks, and all the different nationalities of course. Thank you very much.

**We would like to thank you for having us here and also for your hospitality. Thank you very much. I had never been here before, but I think I want to come back. There is something about Coober Pedy isn't there.**

You are welcomed.

**But there is something in the air.**

There is, there is. The best place I have ever been in my life. Nice and quiet, very friendly people.

**One thing though I didn't ask and luckily I thought about it now, Coober Pedy to me equal dugouts. And yet there are a lot of houses and businesses that are not dugouts.**

Actually Coober Pedy is over 65% underground, like rats, that's the only place in the world. And the best part is the underground houses, they have a steady temperature, between 22 - 25 and they don't have to use heaters or air conditioners, doesn't matter the weather is outside. The only thing is if you want to go to your bedroom you have to put the lights on. That is the only difference.

**And you haven't got any windows.**

The front part of the dugouts, they have windows, you put the kitchen there, you spend the most of your time, lunch room, so not to put the lights on, and plus for fresh air.

**We say dugouts and all underground it's not really actually digging straight down is it?**

No they are at ground level.

**You dig into the side of the mountain.**

It has to be a hill, and what you do you cut the hill, you remove all the loose ground, as soon as you get to the solid ground, it has to be sandstone, and solid ground, then you put the tunnel machine through and you dig your house, so it is at ground level.

**So your house is in a tunnel.**

Tunnels, yes.

**And you open up other tunnels sideways for different rooms.**

You make them square. Yes yes.

**For other rooms as well. Very interesting set up.**

**Once again Yiani, thank you very much.**

Thank you