

**This is an interview with Konstantinos Panagaris on Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2013 at his home in Highbury. 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 Con and thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed.**

Thank you for having me on your program.

**For the record, can you please give us your full name.**

Yes. Konstantinos Panagaris with a K. Australianised to Con.

**Where and when were you born Con?**

I was born in Pyrgos, Greece in the state of Ilias on the 11<sup>th</sup> of the 5<sup>th</sup> 1944. A war baby.

**Yes you were, weren't you, and how many children did your parents have?**

My parents had ten children. Lost three during the war. [Of] the seven surviving children I am the eldest at the present moment and the three that were lost before me.

**You told me in the preliminary interview that your dad went to war. World War 2.**

Yes my dad went to the border of Albania fighting the Italians. Very bad experience, like all wars are and he came back to Pyrgos, he actually walked all the way back to Pyrgos and my mum had to go and collect him from the square because they were, what is the word I am trying to- the Greek is creeping in.

**That's okay, say it in Greek**

Αφασία, in other words, I think, memory loss.

**Oh right.**

They were shell shocked or whatever. War injuries.

**War injuries?**

It took a long time for my dad to come back to health but fortunately he did ---

**Now that must mean that he had children before he went to war.**

Yes he had four with me. I was a baby like I said. He lost the eldest [child] at the age of eight, the other one was two year old [when he passed away] and there was a miscarriage and then I came along.

**So even though he had three children he was still conscripted for the war?**

Yes he was. He was conscripted and mum had a very hard [time] with three children left behind.

**How did mum survive all this time that dad was at war?**

Well they did have property outside of Pyrgos about 20 minute walk, about 17 acres of land and that [was] leased out [to] whoever could cultivate it but he bought a couple of goats so mum can feed us with the milk from the goats and she ended up with more goats as the time went along. When dad came back he found a herd of goats and yes that's how we survived.

**So what did dad do for a living once he was back from the war?**

He came back and realised that there was money to be made through selling the milk because there were people coming asking for milk in the neighbourhood and then he realised let's make a business of it and he became the milkman in the city.

**That's wonderful isn't it?**

Yes it was.

**Now the time that you were there, you were growing up obviously, can you remember much about your childhood?**

I do, I do remember quite a bit actually. I do remember that we were told certain places that we were not allowed to go because there were people that were taken by the Germans and executed so we weren't allowed to go in those places. The schools, it was half-day schools because they were knocked down by the war so we would go in the morning from 7 till 1, come home and then from 2 other kids would go to 5, I'm not 100% on this but 2 till about 5 or 7, I'm not sure.

**So it was two shifts.**

Two shifts because of lack of schools in the city. There was a lot of ruins. There was a lot that I had seen as a child, there were bullets that we used to find, there were kids that were injured by explosion of the bullets. We used to go [to] summer camps with the school because in Greece, [there are] three months of summer [holidays] the boys used

to go for one and a half month to camp, come back and the girls would go. There was a certain track that we had to take and not deviate from there because they still had mines on the beaches and actually I did see a horse and cart blow up and we all did, and it was pretty horrific to see that. Other things, as the time progressed and I can remember more, there was the Karagiozi, which is something like a puppet show that was and still is I think, popular in Greece, and yes with friends that I grew up with, we all roamed together in the neighbourhood.

**So would you say that you had a happy childhood?**

It was because I had no commitments. Somebody else was having the commitments, other than me being a child I was growing up, I had a full stomach, thank god, my parents were not destitute in a way. We always had plenty in the house. Although, I've got to say that at school they used to give us meals, I don't know if the Government subsidised or the parents paid for it, I cannot remember that, but we were fed well. I also remember that some of the children that used to come from their farms and so on they used to come with bread and a bit of sugar to sprinkle on their bread and I couldn't understand that. I asked my mum if I could have the same to be the same as the others and she told me that they had nothing, we are alright.

**So you were the lucky ones weren't you, compared to the others?**

I think we were, we were.

**Yeah, you were very lucky. Now what prompted your parents to think of migrating to Australia then?**

Okay. My parents, like I said, they had 10 children. They lost three. My dad had a farm outside of Pyrgos, about 20 minute walk. In kilometres I cannot say how long it would have been, and it was 17 acres which was not enough, my dad thought for five children as they were growing up and at the time he heard people talking about Australia. He and mum were talking about it and I was always included, of course at the dinner table, that's when they did most of the talking, and I was listening and they said "what do you think about it? They've got a lot of sheep there" they say "and a lot of land". Australia was just a name. We didn't know anything about it, but dad found out about it and said "we can't go". Mum said "why not"? He said "because we've got five children". Only ΔΕΜΕ [ICEM - Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration] which is assisted passage to Australia would not accept a family of five and they would not

accept people from the city. They would only accept people that were destitute and people that had come from the war, had nothing to work for. So at the time, I don't know what prompted me to say, "Dad, I'll stay back". Dad looked at me, didn't say anything, but it came up again, I spoke again and mum said "well he can go and stay with my sister and we will go for two years, and come back". I think that was the going thing at the time, come here for two years, become a millionaire and go back.

### **So true**

Well, I said "okay". To me I didn't know where they were going anyway, but my dad being from Pyrgos, the city, you weren't allowed to come. That was another stumbling block. My mother's brother he was with the Greek Navy and pretty high up and the old saying 'it's who you know not what you know' *meson*, in Greek, and [he] got the ball rolling, but they did not do all the medical examinations or anything. They kept it very quiet from the neighbours and everybody else. They had to go to place called Amaliada which is 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in the state of Ilias, to go through the doctors there and we moved as a unit, the whole family so there was no letting on what was happening. It didn't take that long because like I said, I was 10 -11 [when] I came to Australia so it would have taken months before they got through but dad always had something to say. The thing was when he went to go through medical they rejected him, simply because his hands were too soft. He wasn't a worker and he was too slim. He wasn't fit or he wasn't supposed to be strong enough to do the work that they required here in Australia. So somebody told him from where he was doing the medical, I don't know, it must have been a good person, to go and rough his hands with gravel and drink a lot of water and go back again.

### **So he would have the weight.**

Yeah. So he actually did that and got through. Thank God he did. Anyhow he got through, got all the paper work done and they talked to me and said "look we are going. All together we are going to drop you off at a place called Lehena" which is another town outside of Pyrgos where my auntie worked for the railways and she had five children of her own and I stayed with them until my parents were supposed to bring me to Australia or come back to Greece. It was hard for Mum and Dad and me, I was indifferent. I didn't know what was happening to be honest. I knew that they were going but how far they were going or how long before I would see them again didn't register

because I didn't feel any remorse. When they did arrive in Australia I always got a letter and I got a pound note. I was the richest kid in town.

**Yes, yes!**

It went on for a while and my auntie used to take some of the money because that was some way she could survive to. In no time at all I was ready to go through the medicals and everything of the examinations to come to Australia. Of course I couldn't go to Pyrgos because I wasn't there anymore.

**Of course, as far as your neighbours and friends and family in Pyrgos, [they] didn't know where you were.**

Exactly. So my medical examination was all done in Athens.

**Going back a little bit here, when your parents came to Australia did they tell you a little bit about their journey here?**

They did say their journey was very long, they had rough seas, plates were going from one side of the boat to the other. To me it was just words because, unless you experience something like that, you don't understand. I knew that they arrived in Australia they were happy where they came, but I do know that they missed me.

**Oh they would have, of course they would have. Yes**

Of course there was no telephones, only letters and that was time consuming waiting to hear from ---

**They took a long time to get the mail.**

Yes

**Now when they arrived in Australia, they would have arrived in Fremantle first and then Port Melbourne?**

Yes

**And then Bonegilla?**

Bonegilla. Woodside and then they came to the hostel, in the corner of North and West or Port Road -West Terrace, Port Road.

**Which is the Elder Park.**

Which is Elder Park hostel. They didn't stay there long. They had some relative here, a distant relative that helped them find a house on Port Road, at Hindmarsh and they

resided there until I came. It was a two-bedroom house, not a very well to do house; it was just an old, very old house which has been knocked down since.

**Very basic accommodation. And what work did dad do once he came here?**

My mum never worked. She had the five children. My dad worked for the railways when he first came here, not for very long because the money was not enough and GMH wanted workers and he started work for General Motor Holden's at Woodville plant as a press operator during the night shift, because there was a penalty rate that was paid for the night shift and yes that's where he ended up his working career.

**So he worked at Holden's for a very long time.**

Yes

**So after a while they could see that they could make a bit of money here and they gathered enough to bring you across.**

Yes

**Can you tell us what happened there? Did they pay for your fare?**

They did. They paid for my fare and they actually brought me out by air, aeroplane.

**That would have been very unusual for the 1950's.**

1955 to be exact and in actual fact that was September the 15<sup>th</sup> that I arrived in Adelaide in 1955. It was Dutch KLM airline with 79 people on board. There was five children. They were in the similar sort of situation as I was, including myself there was five. There was one other girl here in Adelaide I don't know if she's still here and if I can remember her name, I can't at the present moment.

**That doesn't matter.**

Anyway.

**That's okay.**

There was one other girl.

**Now I looked at your passport and it says, 'Destination Australia via Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Singapore, India, Indonesia' and last entry is Mascot airport. Now what an adventure for a child?**

It was a great adventure. I wish I could do it now.

**Really?**

Oh really, because simply we flew all day. We left Athens as you could imagine this time of the year in Athens it's summer, very hot, but Egypt, was not just hot it was burning. I have a distinct memory of getting off the plane and going straight under the wing to get away from the sun. It was so hot. They took us every night to a motel or hostels depending on what country you went. In Egypt it was a hostel and we could hear the- I don't know what they call the Muslim priests, Musta or something like that, wailing all night. Being a kid I didn't know what it was all about and I kept asking and people were laughing. Some of the people that were travelling, they had just come back from the war of Korea and they knew what was going on they were telling us this, but it was an experience that's for sure. Now the other memory that I have which stayed close to my memory is Bombay in India. Bombay was the first place that I thought I would be able to get Greek food again or see something that I could eat because in the plane, if you could imagine there was no lining. It was just the bare skin of the plane and I would stick my cheek on the side of the skin to cool down because it was so hot. They gave us wagon wheels, chocolate and bananas. I had not seen a banana in my life before. Chocolate I had, but bananas I had never seen before. We ate as much as we could eat and whatever was left they went off and the smell even up to this day I cannot put a banana close to my face.

**So when you got to Bombay what did you expect?**

Bombay, I expected the same as what I thought, you know like I had seen in the other places, but it was a Sunday or a Saturday night, and Sunday they did not fly. So we had a whole day and there was a gentleman, Indian gentleman, who was married to a Greek girl. He was, [as] I found out afterwards, he was a doctor and was waiting for his papers to be processed to go to live in Greece. At the time the Greek government was run by a person --- oh it escapes me, doesn't matter, Papagos, and there was a lot of red tape he was saying, but anyway, this gentleman took us everywhere. He paid for our meals. I thought he was a millionaire. He must have been well off to pay for all our meals and took us to the botanical gardens. I'd never seen a peacock before in my life or exotic birds they have in the tropics and that was really something magic for me, and still in my mind. But because I hadn't eaten anything, whatever I ate, I just could not hold in my stomach. That was the most important two places I remember. Egypt, Bombay of India and lot of people, I could not understand why there were so many people outdoors

instead of inside their houses. I had no idea that the population was so great. That's about it I think.

**So you arrived in Mascot in Sydney**

No our first stop in Australia was Darwin.

**Oh right.**

But that was only an overnight thing. I do remember Darwin was the first place because they told us, somebody mentioned to us they were bombed by the Japanese but I did not understand what they were talking about. Then Mascot and I stayed in Mascot and after that I came to Adelaide by TAA. TAA I think it was, not sure. [We took seven days to get here].

**What an adventure for a young child.**

It was, I wish I could do it again today like I said, because I would appreciate it a bit more to see the cultures and everything else.

**So you arrive in Adelaide, mum and dad and the children were obviously very happy to see you and you are obviously happy to see them.**

Very happy. Very happy, so happy that everybody was in tears. One thing that --- my siblings were talking in English which I did not understand and I didn't like it. I thought, why are they talking a foreign tongue? They are Greek. I couldn't understand and I didn't like it but that was on a Saturday I arrived and mum being a good mum, Monday morning I was off to school.

**Yes, and at this stage you were 11 years old by this stage.**

Yes I was 11

**Yes and where did you start in school?**

I started at Hindmarsh Primary School on Manton Street Hindmarsh. I remember going to the principal's office and they said with an interpreter "what's your name"? I said "Konstantinos". She said "that's Con is the name". I said "what's that?" "That's your name". I said "No, Konstantinos". "No Con" and that stuck by me since then but that's how it was.

**Konstantinos was too long.**

Was too long but I swore that day I would name all my kids Kim. They can't cut it back.

**At what grade did they put you in?**

They put me in grade 1. I was in grade 4 in Greece and they put me in Grade 1 here in Australia and I wasn't the only one like that. There was a lot of Italians and Greek kids there, because we didn't speak English, and that was a mistake in a lot of ways because maths, geography and other things we were well advanced for our class that they put us in, and instead of trying to do school work we were actually rebelling and today I would say I feel sorry for the school teacher at the time.

**You were that bad were you?**

I think not just me, I think it was all of us, because if you could imagine Greek kids, Italian kids, war torn countries they were more, I wouldn't say advanced, they were more, what is the word I am trying to find, *πονηρά* [streetwise] what would you say that in English, *πονηρό* [streetwise]. The Australians, they were more naive than what we were.

**You were more streetwise.**

I think we were, and being from the city, because we used to roam the street and see a lot of different things and I thought that Australia at the time was backward, believe it or not.

**You had a lot more freedom in Greece.**

Yes we were. Ah yes, we had the freedom to do whatever we --- yes within reason, within reason I say, the freedom. Like I said, we were restricted from going to certain places and one in particular --- In Greece we would make kites in spring time and so on --- we'd make kites and there was a place that had beautiful bamboos to make kites out of bamboos and we thought we would go there. The bamboos were bigger and stronger. When we started ripping out the bamboos they had very shallow root, we started finding bones and skeletons, so, what we did, silly kids, we put the skulls on the bamboo and walked in town. We were taken to the police station and a policeman was dispatched to go and get each child's parent. Well, I tell you what- I've still got the mark on my hip. My father was so embarrassed that the policeman came to his door. Now that was a bad experience.

**So you stayed in primary school until what age?**

In Australia?

**Australia yes.**

I stayed 'til the age of 15.

**And then what happened**

I actually started working for a place called Globetrotter Caravans. I was doing --- the job was called 'doping' which was to put tape on the edges of the plywood to stop it from --- water proofing it. I was there for a very short time. Then I got a job with James N Kirby hopefully to get a job as an apprentice for refrigeration. It didn't happen simply because his wife's nephew came out of school and they were only allowed one apprentice and guess who was taken on? Not me. So no, I didn't do an apprenticeship but I always strived to do a bit better than being a labourer. I ended up putting TV antennas, before TV even came to Adelaide. I remember putting TV antennas at Elizabeth where there were only two houses, English and a German and I couldn't understand how two enemies could be neighbours but anyhow yeah and that were the first jobs that I had after leaving school.

**Did your siblings continue on to high school?**

Yes they did they finished school, they ended up with Croydon Boys Technical High School. One of my brothers got a trade as a fitter, turner and toolmaker, the other is --- they did well for themselves all of them but I did not go to high school. At the same time I did not stop learning or teaching myself things that I needed to do better for myself in life. I worked for the Gas Company. That was a job that I got and a very good job. I built myself up to become the governor of the --- what they call the governor is a person that is looking after a gas holder that governs the gas that goes into each suburb. That locality today is the Thebarton, what they call it, the Ice Arena.

**Oh right, that's where it was?**

That's where it was, and I was in charge there. One of the better jobs I had and believe it or not, they gave me a gun.

**Why?**

No bullets, because it was something that they had instilled during the war, had to go around the gas cylinder to make sure that nobody would sabotage it. I used to fall over drunks but the gun was no good to me.

**It just looked good?**

Yes.

**Okay so you worked in various jobs for quite a while but then you wanted to go into business of your own.**

What happened, like I said, I was working for the gas company. I became redundant. The natural gas came in and I thought what am I going to do? I had a good job with the money that I got, so I decided to go into business for myself and being Greek I guess, I went into a Fish and Chip shop, Chicken shop which was starting chickens at the time and yes I ended up opening up a shop on Kensington Road in the Erindale Shopping Centre.

**Did you have a good command of the English language by then?**

Oh yes, I did, I did. I was actually- my skills in English language I think they came to fruition within about two years.

**Oh Excellent.**

The other thing was that as I was growing up there was a lot of young Greek men coming to Australia and I enjoyed helping them out with different interpretation that I was doing for them, whereas my father to bring me here in Australia, found that very difficult. To get some other Greek person to show him where the Immigration Department was, from Hindley Street to North Terrace where the Immigration Department was at the time, he charged him a week's wages.

**You're joking?**

I'm not joking. That's a fact and I got to meet this person later on in life, I wasn't very happy and neither was he, but anyway, now that was one thing, that I pride myself into helping people wherever they need help and even till today, I will give the same for any person.

**That's wonderful isn't it?**

As my mum used to say, 'one hand washes the other and both wash the face'.

## **Excellent**

The English way is 'you scratch my back I scratch your back'.

**Exactly. So you started with the fish and chip shop as you said, many Greeks do that. Why is there a need for these migrants that come out here, to want to go into their own business after they've worked for somebody else for a while?**

Simply because they have to have security, and what is security? Security is to put a roof over your family's head, educate your children and the only way to do it is to work harder and the way we knew was a fish and chip shop, that's the way the Greeks did it and you knew some other Greek that had a fish and chip shop as they did and you saw that they did better than what the working in the factory or for a wage so that's why it was a decision made that way.

**Was it also that you could include the whole family in working together?**

Yes, that is one thing. Include the whole family, the other thing to add to send our children to a better school for education and --- When I was growing up every child, Australian or Anglo Saxon, they used to be school holidays and they used to say "Oh what did you do during the school holidays? Oh we went on a camp or we went to Victor Harbor we went there and what did you do?" We used to stay mute, because we didn't do anything. We couldn't afford to do anything.

**That's right.**

But we wanted to do. It's not that we didn't want to do it, was just we didn't have the means to be able to do these things.

**You couldn't afford these things back then?**

So we wanted our children to do, to assimilate them within the society of the country we lived in.

**And do better than you did.**

Exactly

**That's what a family wants, for their children to do better. Did your parent's buy their own home eventually?**

Yes they did. They did buy their own home and mum was a very good economist. Although she never worked, dad worked night shift at GMH as I said, slept during most of the day and mum did all the shopping. Having so many children [two more children

were born in Australia] we used to go to Blacks on Port Road, the shoe shop, and she used to put a pound every week because we all needed a pair of shoes by the time one wore off the other one needed a pair. So yes she scrimped and saved whichever way she could, and put a deposit together to buy a house at Ovingham. I remember the money was not enough for a deposit and the agent actually lent us money of his own and I had to go and pay him. Every time my dad got paid I used to go and give him five pounds, I think it was to make up.

**To repay him for the loan that he gave you. And then you obviously got married and you had family of your own and you bought your own home as well?**

Yes I got married young, very young, simply because here in Australia, in the beginning, a lot of the Greek parents were very strict, very strict and a lot of the Anglo Saxons didn't want to know us, so it's either get married young or get married in any other way you could you know. So most of my generation did marry young, I was 21 and my wife was very young too. I am not going to say her age because she may not like it.

**But you could understand why your parents were strict. They were protecting you from the unknown, an unknown country.**

Exactly, exactly they were. Being a parent today and having girls especially, you do become overprotective at times but you didn't understand at the time but you do understand as you become a parent.

**Yes of course. Now growing up, a teenager and as a young adult, you would have seen many, many Greek people coming out here and some of them were isolated, there was a bit of loneliness, many of the girls in particular had never been out of their village and all of a sudden they were here in Australia far away in a foreign country. How important was it for these 'new Australians' as they were called back then, how important was it for them to keep their religion, their language, their music, their dancing, their food, basically their culture, how important was it that they maintained that?**

Very, very important I tell you. I go a step back, my parents, my father, when he first came to Australia or Adelaide, they had him earmarked to go to Port Lincoln. He didn't go because [there was] no Greek church there at the time. There was no Greek church and he said "I did not bring my children in Australia in a foreign country to become Atheists". So he decided to stay here in Adelaide. Church is important, first of all it gives you rules to abide by, the other thing it keeps the family together and coming secondly would be friends and family. Now, we didn't have many friends from

our part of Greece, like I said there was a --- being from a city we didn't have a --- I think there was only one other family that was on the other side of the city we used to see them every three months, when we could get a taxi. You know I think, like I said it was important to find another Greek because you found a similarity, something that wasn't foreign. Although we were in a foreign country we had to assimilate very slowly, it wasn't something that would be done overnight and they did do it. The people worked hard. Some people had relatives here, they were lucky because they had family within the family. Also I don't know Helen, if you remember being in the house where you used to put pennies to cook and you would stand in line. There was a lot of that happening, and there were families that were living together. We were lucky because there was only our family but I do remember the penny slot for the gas but we had, after a while, we got to know a few people they were from the same boat that my parents came and we used to visit and they visit us and that was the going thing.

**You made friends because basically you were from the same country, you spoke the same language and you had the same beliefs as well.**

Exactly

**So churches were built back then?**

There was one church here in Adelaide. A little one in Franklin Street and we used to go there and then I remember after that, there was a church built not built actually, there was North Terrace. There was the other church that was for very short period of time. A priest by the name of Karamanli was there and then of course more priests came out and they started St George church [at Thebarton] and the one at Unley and as time progressed we got enough churches here in Adelaide and we thank God, our children still maintain their religion, the customs.

**These churches also provided Greek Schools.**

They sure do. They do provide Greek schools and I'm proud to say that my children all of them have gone to the Greek schools. Greek dancing, that's done through the churches initially. Culture and a bit of Greek history has been also provided by the Greek schools. As parents, like I said, most of the Greeks that initially came were not very educated people, so it was important that our kids learnt the heritage of their birth or their parents' birthplace.

**Exactly and what about entertainment, how do the Greeks go about entertaining? Have bit of time of particularly on the weekends?**

Yes there was the Olympic Hall.

**Brings back memories.**

Does bring back memories. Olympic Hall was the place, [the] only place that --- it was a family affair it wasn't just for young or in between, that was for everybody, children, babies, old people. It was a Greek gathering. That's what it was. Some good memories, some bad memories, but I'll leave the bad ones behind. There were good memories and I think the brain always remembers the good memories more than the bad ones.

**Exactly, so what did they actually do at the Olympic Hall?**

There were a lot of plays. There were poems read, dances, Greek cuisine, very important and of course, as a young man, I used to like go and see some of the young Greek girls there.

**Exactly, exactly.**

Unfortunately some of the Greek fathers did not like that.

**Over protective dads?**

Over protective dads, yes.

**What about the food? Can you remember as a young man here, was there much Greek food available?**

The only one that I know of is the Star Grocery in Hindley Street, corner of Hindley and Morphett [Road]. There was the Star Grocery where we used to go, most of the Greeks used to go there and get all their food stuff, but after that there were a lot that opened up, there was Vageli at Torrensville.

**Foodland**

And there was Arthur Kontopoulos with his ---

**Omega Foods**

Yeah, Omega Foods and then Gaganis Brothers and so on, and so on. Now there's, any supermarket you go whether its Foodland, Coles or anything, you find Greek foods on their shelves and I remember, and I think you remember too Helen, "who ate garlic?" at

school and you know "Oh it stinks, who ate garlic?" Now I think the Australian public eats more garlic than what the Greek does.

**I think so too now.**

And well I think, culturally, I think we have a lot that we [have] contributed to this country.

**Exactly yes.**

And I'm proud, I'm proud to say that it's good because it brings us closer as a community, as a country, we are not the 'wogs' or the 'dagos' or the 'new Australians' that we were branded in the initial stages. We are Con Panagaris and so on and so on and so on. You are known by your name, you've got your neighbour who is an Australian and they come to your house, we go to their house and we assimilated in this country that we can call our own today.

**Exactly, and we've both, everybody, has gained by this experience.**

We have and they have.

**Yes, exactly**

I think everybody, like you said, everybody has gained. We've learned, we grew up. If we face reality Australia is 200 years old and we have been here 60 years. So you know, [for] a third of the countries age we've been here. So one thing that I have, maybe it the wrong thing to say here, I don't like about this country right now, is when I have to fill any forms that says 'Caucasian, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander'. Why brand us that way? We [are] all Australians and should be. Where were you born --- reasons being for historical or registry ---? We're in the same country. Our children are born here. They are Australians they are not Greeks today. Greece is a foreign country. All they say sometimes, "dad what happened there?" "Do you remember this?" When they say something on the television, "have you been there dad"? They don't know. That's the only thing that I've said, maybe it's the wrong thing that I am saying but I do believe that we should all be equal.

**Fair enough. Now, music and theatre and cinema are very important to Greeks.**

Very important.

**Was that provided at all in the '50s and the '60s?**

It was. We had the pictures brought out, the cinema at the Thebarton Theatre. Wrestling, another thing, and me, I did Greco Roman wrestling myself as a young man. I enjoyed it but most of all the theatre, the movies, they were bringing our parents closer to home. They were keeping the Greek heritage alive and we learnt. I remember seeing a movie [with] Fotopoulos and Hatzichristos, done during the depression in Greece, they go outside the restaurant and they are looking through the window and they said, looking at all the food they had no money and they said "I don't like that one, I don't like that one, ah there's rice, can't have rice it makes you bloated". Now that was funny to us kids but the parents remembered they went through the hardship, that's what made them come to Australia.

**Exactly, but you also had the comedies, I remember back then.**

Yes we had the comedies, yes. there was the comedies that we had and they were good, Hatzichristos. Look, it's like everything else; comedy is also something that is in cultural because you're dealing with everyday life. It was, for us grown up here in Australia, [did it] really happen? Whereas our parents, they laugh because they experienced it. Yes it was comedies, there was dancing, there was also bringing artists and then as we grew and more Greeks, we started, as a young man, the GOYA [Greek Orthodox Youth of Australia] Greek organisation for youth and so on. We had a great time there. Then later on we started the picnics, down [at] Victor Harbor is one place where all the Greeks used to congregate around January the Australia Day [holiday].

**Australia Day.**

And that was great. I don't know if it is still going, I'll be honest with you. I haven't been for many years, probably it's not the right thing to do but, like I said there is so many other things happening.

**Well exactly.**

We had Glendi, and I am proud to say that I was involved in a big way. I was president of the Lions Club of Adelaide Hellenic in 1982 and they, with AHEPA [Australian Hellenic Educational Progressive Association], the West Torrens Football Club and Hellas Soccer Club started the Glendi Greek Festival. Very successful, until recent years they went to Adelaide High and then elsewhere. It's still going, it's still going and it's good because the young kids are looking forward to going to experience the food, the music and the culture.

**Did you find that Glendi also gave the opportunity to the various brotherhoods and the associations, the regional associations, gave them the opportunity to meet in one place and the different cuisines from the different regions of Greece were there?**

Yes that's true and we are lucky there. The Greeks [in Greece] haven't got that, we have. We are more Greek than the Greeks there [in Greece] because we do experience the islands, north[ern] Greece, south[ern] Greece, east[ern] Greece and west[ern] Greece. We experience all of Greece within that weekend the Glendi was. Like Kalamata Siligos [Brotherhood], Messinian Silogos [Brotherhood], Ilian Silogos [Brotherhood], and so and so on, and so on. Yes and we used to say on the Sunday [Glendi was on Saturday and Sunday] was 'Australian day' because all the *xeni* in other words 'non-Greeks', there used to be more of non-Greeks than there were Greeks [on the Sunday]. They used to come and enjoy our foods and there were huge --- [numbers] coming into the place.

**Yes exactly. It was a good introduction to the non-Greeks to experience the Greek cuisine, the Greek music, basically the whole Greek culture and everybody got to love Glendi and looked forward to it every year.**

Yes, quite true, quite true. We had some very big names that came. Dallaras for one that was here. The Trio Bell Canto, they were in my house.

**Isn't it wonderful.**

And they were fantastic, nice people. We had great times, it was a happy gathering of -- and you know one thing that I didn't see drunks anywhere. Everybody was happy, dancing, drinking and eating and being in a festive mood which was great and you know in some ways, I miss it. Probably I should try and stay longer instead of going for a couple of hours and going home because I am getting old.

**We're saying that in Glendi there were different brotherhoods that took part and they had their own specialties they were selling. In the '50s, a lot of these brotherhoods were formed, can you tell me why each region needed to have an association of their own?**

It's an identification I would say and a reason of belonging. Although, like in England, Greece, Italy, you go from one region to another and you have a different custom. The customs here have got smaller because we inter-married with each other, like Greeks within different parts of Greece, so we are able to assimilate in the culture that they have from the wives side or the husband's side or the in-laws. In the initial stages we, as we came from the region, we stayed with our region.

**And you had your own organisation in that region.**

Exactly, exactly but like I said, as younger children grew up to be young adults and married within each [region], their culture mingled and merged into one.

**One other thing that developed in the '50s was the kafeneia, the coffee houses. Can you tell us a little about the kafeneia?**

No I am sorry, I have never been a kafeneio person.

**What was the reason behind them do you know?**

The reason was for the older Greeks to be able to see and talk about their lifestyle and work and so on. Me being young that I came here, I didn't have the need, whereas the immigrants that came, like our parents, did have the need because that was their meeting place, other than church. Very important, but for me I didn't experience it. I cannot say "yes I did have that experience".

**No but for the older ones, as you said, it was important for them, and can we say it's very similar to the Aussie pub, where you solved the world's problems there. You met over a coffee and you talked about anything and everything?**

I can't say it is similar, simply for this. When I was a young boy growing up, say 12, 13, 14, I was selling newspapers in Australian hotels. I didn't see women, [in the] kafeneio you didn't see women either, but in the pub there was 6 o'clock closing and they would line up the bar with drinks and there were drunks all over the road. Whereas the kafeneio they would go there for different reasons, first of all to find out if there was a better job going somewhere else, the other thing was family, or if they wanted to get a girl or a boy married off to see if they can find somebody, a matchmaker to have a proxy going. It was a meeting place for their social lifestyle that was happening. You can't compare the pub with the kafeneio, I can't anyway.

**No that's ok. Just that I have heard it said that it was a men's place and it was similar to what the Aussies have with their pub.**

The Aussies did have their beer gardens, that was something similar I would say, where women and children were allowed, but not in the pub. Yeh, okay, the kafeneio is a meeting place to discuss events of what's going to happen, future, past and so on.

**Yes okay. Now did you ever go back to Greece?**

I did at the age of 41, 33 years after I came to Australia.

**How did you feel when you went to your city?**

Foreign, very foreign in my own country. Right from the gate where I came into the airport until I left the --- When I went to Greece, they had trouble with the video camera first of all, the people --- customs, that's the word. It was stamped and sealed with the Australian seal and they told me here I did not have to unpack it in Greece. They would give it to me in Athens as I got to the airport. When I got there, they wanted me to unpack it and --- I said "there's the paperwork and everything else". Anyhow, look I had a lot of problems initially. When I got out of the airport, met the relatives, "Ο Αυστραλός" 'The Australian', I said "I was born here", "no you are the Australian". I was branded something that I didn't like. The 'Australian' in Greece, the 'Greek' in Australia. I thought where the hell do I belong? But I went there during election time, as you know we had elections recently here, nobody knew what happened. There I'm sure that the whole country moves from one side of Greece to the other, if it was an island I reckon it would have tipped. It was an experience. It was an experience.

**Sounds like it.**

But I loved it. The longer that I stayed the more I liked it. I started to get into the routine of things, I stayed six weeks in Greece but like I said my relatives in Greece are from all over Greece and I didn't know them really, they were strangers to me.

**Well you were too young when you left.**

That is one thing, the other I never knew them as a young child. So to me they were strangers that I met, but I did not stay in one place in Greece, every second day I moved on to get to know Greece as much as possible. I liked it. I would go back yes, but for a holiday, not more.

**So home is where?**

Here. Home is here.

**Very emphatic.**

Here. Australia is home. Australia has been good for us. We will never ever stop being Greek, never, it's something that if you rip your body apart you will find Greece in there, but we could not live there once we experience life here. That's what I believe anyway.

**No, it's very difficult isn't it? Well thank you very much Con for today it's been a wonderful experience listening to your story. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

There is one other thing I would like to add and that is my wife. I've been very, very lucky, very blessed that I got a great woman as my wife, she's been a partner, mother and a good person, above all a very fair person. She worked alongside me for the family and still does and I thank her very much for being my partner and you Helen for being the person you are, a nice person and it's a real pleasure to get to know you.

**Thank you very much Con, it's been a pleasure speaking to you and getting to know you too. Thank you once again.**