

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Margaret Henry - Lecturer

Tuesday 1.00pm - 3.00pm

SUMMARY OF TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

GREEKS IN NEWCASTLE

INTERVIEWER - JUDY GAVRILIS

INTERVIEWEE - TOULA

DATE - 7th SEPTEMBER, 1989

Toula was born in 1929 in Athens, the capital city of Greece, land of sunshine, clear blue seas, wine and dance, archaeology and a rich heritage of history and mythology. It is interesting to note that, though born in 1929, a time of political unrest and economic depression which lasted for many years and culminated in the Second World War (though this was not a product of Greece's hard times), Toula passes no remarks whatsoever regarding these first 15 or more years of her life. She remembers only the good times of partying, picnicking, enjoying all the cultural and social aspects of a big city life.

Her family was obviously quite comfortably off, living as they did in their own family home in a very nice area of Athens between America Square and Kipselli - an area which even today is regarded as a 'good area'. Toula's father had his own business in retail and her mother never needed to work outside the home. Life was 'pretty complicated' in those days with household duties being much harder and more tedious and so cleaners and a live-in housekeeper were employed to help out.

Just the fact that Toula and her sister and brother received a completed education at a time when in 1929 40% of all Greeks over the age of 10 years were illiterate, tells us quite a bit about the family's circumstances. After completing her Higher School Certificate Toula went to work in her father's business, remaining there for four or five years. Afterwards she trained with T.A.E., as it was called then (Olympic Airways of today) for six months to become an air hostess. She remained for one year with the company at which time T.A.E. ran into financial difficulties and many staff were given 'permanent leave without pay'! including Toula.

Life is full of strange twists for all and so it was with Toula. At just this time in her life her brother-in-law arrived from Australia with his mother to settle some properties they had in Greece. Toula was invited to return to Newcastle, Australia with them to see her sister whom she had not seen for five years. Imagine her excitement at the prospect of a long sea voyage to a country about which everyone was talking at that time, to see her sister with whom she had been so close all their lives.

Arriving in Sydney in 1953 Toula was greatly inspired by Sydney

Harbour. Her sister was there to meet her, along with a first cousin by marriage who, Toula tells us, later became her husband (though she's not really sure how or why these days!). At the time however, being at the marriageable age, it must have seemed like a good idea.

Having a sound knowledge of the English language, Toula found no difficulty in becoming self-reliant in this new and strange country. Knowing Toula today, this is not surprising. About twelve months after Toula married, her sister divorced and came to stay with Toula, bringing with her one child, a daughter. They stayed with Toula for a couple of years and then left Australia to return to Greece. Though Toula was sad to see her sister go, she was glad that she had finally decided to do something about her life situation.

Unfortunately, Toula's life was not all she could have hoped for, although her two children brought her great happiness. After ten years in Australia, she returned to Greece for a holiday but secretly hoping to find some way of remaining there. This was not to be, however, and she returned to Newcastle where, apart from the occasional trip back home, she has been ever since. After the break-up of her own marriage, Toula began to look for permanent work in order to support herself and her two children. She had already been a teacher of the Greek language at the Greek afternoon schools throughout Newcastle and even Gosford, and had been an active member of the Greek Community of Newcastle.

After trying several things such as baby-sitting and factory work-where she lasted only six weeks because of the absolute monotony of the job - Toula saw an advertisement for a job as an interpreter with the Ethnic Affairs Commission. Upon application for the job and after sitting some tests in both the Greek and English languages, Toula was employed by the E.A.C. where she remained for four years.

She then had to return to Greece on personal affairs which kept her there for much longer than was intended and so she was put into the unfortunate position of being forced to resign her job as interpreter. However, when she eventually returned to Australia nine months later, she applied to the Department of Health, Migrant Health Unit, where she was put on as a sessional interpreter (on-call). This position led to a permanent part-time position where she is still working today.

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Toula has done all sorts of courses during her life including shorthand/typing, an open foundation course at university, many and varied W.E.A. courses and a Greek literature correspondence course through the University of New England.

Toula believes that had her married life been happier, she would have had no regrets about coming to Australia. As it is now, however, she feels it is too late to think about returning to Greece. Her children are now more Australian than anything and in any case, she says, the Greece of today is not the Greece of yesterday which she recalls with such fond memories. It is a sad state of affairs to be caught between two worlds, only half belonging to each one, but Toula believes that people in this type of situation have the makings of becoming very tolerant human beings!

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This is Judy Gavrilis, Open Foundation student at the University of Newcastle 1988. Today I'm interviewing Toula of Merewether, a Greek lady. For personal reasons Toula does not want her surname mentioned on this tape, that is why it has been omitted. Toula was born in Athens in 1929 and came to Newcastle in 1953. She was a migrant with a difference in that she actually only came to Newcastle to... on a holiday to see her sister... who had been in Australia for five years at that time. Toula however, met and married a Greek man and stayed in Newcastle from then on!

Judy: What sort of life did you have in Athens?

Toula: A very good life, - now I think I can look back ... and have happy feelings about it.

Judy: Your parents, um were they ... did they ... what sort of work did your father do?

Toula: My father was in the retail business ... um.... he was doing very well and was financially independent ... he was not a millionaire but he was doing very well.

Judy: Did he have his own business?

Toula: Yes, we had our business - we lived in a nice middle class house in a nice area in Athens.

Judy: What area was that?

Toula: It was ...um ... between America Square and Kipselli.

Judy: Oh .. And did your mother work?

Toula: My mother never worked, no.

Judy: She never helped your father in his business?

Toula: No she didn't have to work she was just bringing up three children.

Judy: And that was you and you have a brother?

Toula: I was the youngest (clink), there was my brother and another girl and I was the youngest girl. So, those days life at home was pretty complicated ... it was not easy for a woman ... with three children it wasn't easy to go out to work unless she had to. They were very particular, cooking was complicated ... they were busy all day (laugh) she also always had cleaners to help her.... a live-in house keeper .. so that's what she did.

Judy: And you went to school?

Toula: Mmmmm. I went to school, I finished highschool.

Judy: And did you do anything after that (pause) university or ..?

Toula: After that I went to help my father for 4 or 5 years, I think, at the business, and after that I trained myself as (what do you call it?) flying horses. Flying horses, aeroplanes?

Stewardesses flying horses.

Judy: I don't know what that is.

Toula: IPTAMENI SINOTHOS -

Judy: I still don't know what it is!(laugh)

Toula: The air hostesses air hostess is that better?

Judy: Oh, sorry, yes.....OK...Oh really (much confusion)

Toula: We used to call them flying hostess.

Judy: Oh, ... and you trained yourself?

Toula: Well,...they trained us for six months, you know, -----

Judy: Oh really?

Toula: and I joined what is called now T.A.E. ... no,... the Olympic now.... used to be called the T.A.E.

Judy: Oh, that's interesting.

Toula: And um, well that's all the work I've done.

Judy: And how long did you work as a hostess?

Toula: About a year

Judy: And was that just um domestic, or did you go -----

Toula: It was domestic if I'd stayed any longer I would travel abroad as well anyway unfortunately, I missed out because financially the company didn't go well at all those days they rigged out to give holidays to everyone see, without pay of course, so at that time my brother-in-law had come from Australia with his mother, to sell some property or something and um ...

Judy: When you say you had a pleasant life in Athens, what did you mean? (pause) What, what sort of things did you do being a young lady of 21 - 22 years?

Toula: Oh.. for instance we, mostly frequented live theatres, operas, um a lot of parties, concerts, things like that mainly.

Judy: Mixed company?

Toula: Mixed company. Yes ... um nightclubs, beautiful nightclubs.

Judy: What sort of things? ----

Toula: we can't do without these clubs.

Judy: What were they like?

Toula: Oh.... beautiful music,um beautiful surroundings um first class sort of night clubs and of course taverns and things like that There was a lot of conversation in the group between say men and women.

This was one of the things I found difficult when I came to Australia the womans ... the women mostly created their own little group or circle, talking mainly about .. ah... either babies or knitting and they were not interested in anything else ... um.... and the men seemed to gather together and have a drink. (laugh)

Judy: Men ... that well known Australian phenomenon - men up one end and women up the other end of the room.

Toula: Yes, it seems that a lot of Greeks inherited it too (laugh)

Judy: Well.... maybe the Australians inherited it from the Greeks!

Toula: Maybe, maybe.

Judy: Yes, ah, so it sounds as though your life in Athens was wonderful? (long pause) so because ----

Toula: Oh no.... it was just an average good life because living in a bigger city a bigger city always provides something like that ... like Sydney or other placesum it was very cultural and very pleasant.

Judy: So, when you came to Australia to visit your sister on holidays, you wouldn't have had any of the feelings, that a person having decided to immigrate to Australia would have had?

Toula: Oh no, whatsoever I only came for a trip as far as I'm concerned. I was a had a visa.....um a tourist visa ah there.... it was no suggestion or thought at all that I would stay here.

Judy: How long had it been since you'd seen your sister?

Toula: Ah... 5 years.

Judy: So I guess you were excited about seeing her?

Toula: Mmmmm, very much, very much.

Judy: And what did you do when you came, - what were your first impressions of Newcastle?

Toula: Oohh..... it's been so long now (pause) laugh I forgotwell I wasn't overall greatly impressed with Newcastle.

Judy: How did it compare to Athens at that time?

Toula: It didn't compare you couldn't compare it.

Judy: Culturally?

Toula: Culturally, there was nothing therehardly anything ... these days it's much better, but 36 years ago they didn't have much. they didn't have a cultural centre, they didn't have anything much.

Judy: So you -----

Toula: I think I remember that I like the main Post Office building and a couple of others and also the city hall and generally the houses were pretty shabby.

Judy: Mmmm.... Did your sister have a nice place?

Toula: Very average very average.

Judy: Um ... What how big was Newcastle then? Was it ...---

Toula: Well, it wasn't as big as it is now, it has spread since then it was more or less the same except for the latest developments

Judy: What did you do -----

Toula: I always thought Newcastle is a beautiful place too beautiful, because of the natural .. ah.... not resources ... um..... landscapes? all beaches, all around as in the landscape is very nice but I always thought they've never done anything much to develop it in the way in which it should have been done a long time ago not only last year that they fixed the foreshore and all this

Judy: TrueWhen you came out to see your sister in 1953, did you know any English at that stage?

Toula: I had a good knowledge of English you know, I could read and write but not being able to speak fluently of course, this came with the years with reading and all that.

Judy: Did you study English at school?

Toula: AAhh, at school we studied French ... those days ... I can speak pretty well French, then um but ... somehow we have private lessons in English..... we used to love the English language my sister and I this is,and as I say we learnt to read and write and talk a bit so I had a sound knowledge when I came.

Judy: And how did you come over to Australia?

Toula: How?

Judy: Mm Mm!

Toula: You mean by ship or what?

Judy: Yes, Do you remember the name of the ship?

Toula: Yah, Orion

Judy: And where did the what was your port of call first port of call?

Toula: Actually we left Pireaus in a small boat, we went to Naples and stayed there for a couple of days, and that's when we got aboard to Orion the Orion.

Judy: A big passenger ship?

Toula: Mmm.

Judy: Were there lots of migrants people immigrating ... on the ship?

Toula: Ah... not too many quite a few but not too many there were a lot of people, actually were just travelling you know.

Judy: And was it mainly um Greek passengersor ?

Toula: No, no. Mixed a lot of English people it was an English ship.

Judy: Oh. it was English.... Ah. And your first port of call in Australia was?

Toula: Fremantle

Judy: And your impressions?

Toula: Beautiful I love it

Judy: And then from there?

Toula: And then there was Melbourne and Sydney Adelaide of course before that, Melbourne, Sydney I was terribly, wildly impressed with the Sydney harbour ... eh... I've never seen anything like that Beautiful.

Judy: I still think it's one of the most beautiful harbours in the world ----

Toula: It is lovely.

Judy: gorgeous and you got off in Sydney?

Toula: Mmm.

Judy: Who was there to meet you?

Toula: My sister and ..ah .. her, let's say her first cousin by marriage.... he ..(laughing) ... who came to be my future husband.

Judy: Oh, I see, and you came straight to Newcastle.

Toula: Mmm, Yes.

Judy: What were your impressions of the countryside ... the trip from Sydney to Newcastle?

Toula: Rather boring.

Judy: There wasn't much between and there still isn't. Ah, so you arrived in Newcastle.....

Toula: Except .. oh ..of course the Hawkesbury River..... it's always been nice and pretty.

Judy: So you arrived it was 195(3) .. 3 and how did Newcastle then compare with Athens?

Toula: Well you can't really compare Newcastle to Athens because it's a smaller town to a bigger city ... well Athens is not big in size because it can offer everything that a big city offers. ... ah it couldn't compare.

Judy: And what sort of life did your sister lead? What sort of things did you do when you first came here?

Toula: Oh nothing much my sister was not working, because I was on holidays, I was sitting down talking and talking forever, (laugh) catching up on everything ah ... we went to Sydney 2 or 3 times, shopping, just looking around, oh... we didn't do all that much at the time.

Judy: Um... You said that her first cousin later became your husband. um how did that come about?

Toula: I wished I knew (laugh)

Judy: When did you become engaged?

Toula: About 3 months after I came to Australia....

Judy: And did you go back to Athens and come back to marry himor?

Toula: No, no. I stayed here.... we were married here after one year and then I went for a trip to Athens, 10 years afterwards with 2 little children.....

Judy: How did you feel about that?

Toula: Terrible I was dying to go back and show my parents my children (laugh) ... yes, except from of course seeing everything else and the friends and

Judy: In the beginning how did you feel about making a decision like that?

Toula: Mmmm. It's a long story actually..... it's not so easy to say it in one phrase ah.... I don't know ... I didn't feel anything terrible I suppose when I was asked to be married and stay in Australia my first reaction was I don't know whether I could like to live here forever, you know, but ah..... I made the decision someway or another and here I am.

Judy: Did you miss your home then - you must have?

Toula: At the time, I think, I was at the marriageable sort of age and I wanted to have a family, you know. I can't say that I was overall so terribly nostalgic.... I always wanted to go, you know,ah I think if I had a happy life here it wouldn't be a great obstacle you know, that I was not there.....'cause years later I started to feel thisnostalgia and due, I suppose to the circumstances that people from other countries have to go through here andum...it's always practical I suppose to bring up children in your own country - you have much less problems.

Judy: Mmmm that's true. How did your parents feel about it?

Toula: Oh well, they were never happy to ...ah... for this to happen butwell as long as they thought I was happy enough....

Judy: I suppose with your sister being here as well they were used to having their children go off to the other side of the world?

Toula: Mmmm. The problem is that my sister didn't stay that long here too..(laugh)

Judy: She returned to Greece did she?

Toula: After I got married, after a year or so.....suddenly got divorced - she stayed with me for a few years and then she left for Athens with her daughter so.....

Judy: So you were left alone?

Toula: Mmmm.

Judy: Did you have ..make many friends then... did you make friends when you first came to Newcastle?

Toula: Oh, I made maybe a few you could call acquaintances.... friends I suppose I made some but um.....

Judy: Were they Greek people?

Toula: Most of the yeah.

Judy: Did they belong to.... was there a Greek community formed at that stage?

Toula: Oh yes there was..... they didn't have as yet, say a church or a community hall... but it was formed you know.

Judy: Were the people different from the kind of circle you'd left in Athens?

Toula: Mmmm. What do you mean exactly?

Judy: What sort of life did they lead generally in Newcastle? Was it the type of life you'd been used to?

Toula: No it was entirely different really, very, very different.

Judy: In what way?

Toula: In what way that the difference in Europe between cities, city life and village life (Mmm) it's not so big... you feel estranged more or less with them more than you would with Australians or Americans you know. I had more in common with Americans....knowing the music and the books and things like that than I had with them.

Judy: I see.

Toula: We had altogether a different level of culture and way of thinking - they were possibly all very nice people...er it's not exactly what I was looking forward to.

Judy: After your sister left how did you feel? (pause)

Toula: Well....relieved in a way because she had to do something for her own life ...ah.... and of course it became more lonely.

Judy: Mmm. Did you have any children at that stage?

Toula: Yes I had (pause) mmm... I don't remember if I had the second one (pause while calculating) yes, yes, the second one was a baby .. Sorry about that.

Judy: That's alright ... It's a long way ~~back~~ isn't it. Did you work at all?

Toula: No at first, no.... I suppose I didn't have to work and then I wanted to be at home and look after the children till they went to school.

Judy: And when they went to school did you go out to work?

Toula: Yes, I started looking to do something ...um...there wasn't much I can do because I didn't have any English qualifications, I just had the Greek Higher School Certificate .. um

Judy: Was that not recognized here then... The fact that you'd ---

Toula: I never thought at that time, whether recognized or not, but the first time I thought what to do, I wanted to find something to do for two or three hours till the children came home from school. And I went to... started teaching at the Greek school... the afternoon Greek school from 4pm to 6pm.

Judy Where was that?

Toula Oh that was in Hamilton, Mayfield... I even taught in Gosford

Judy Really?

Toula For a while.

Judy How did you get into that?

Toula Oh, through the priest... they needed someone so I used to go.

Judy You travelled down?

Toula I travelled by car.

Judy Just for the day?

Toula Mmm.

Judy While the children were at school, or did you take them with you?

Toula I think this was much later when the children were a bit grown up... that was about ...um.. 12 years ago, something like 13 years, so they were just waiting for me to come back.

Judy Mm...um.. Did you do any other sort of work?

Toula Oh.... Actually, I learnt shorthand and typing but never managed to get a job.... I was that was much later too... I was over 40 and of course they were not employing over 40 ladies very easily...um... so .. I tried everything after I got divorced. I tried babysitting, I tried factory... I had... they had me there... I do remember somewhere.... I think where they make the keys, I can't remember the name.. that was my worst experience ever. They...

Judy Why, what happened there?

Toula I think it was 6 weeks training and after the 6 weeks I couldn't stay if they paid me a million dollars and they wouldn't keep me either.... (laugh) I used to fall asleep... it was so monotonous... so that was it in the factory days..

Judy What did you do?

Toula I don't know... I make... I was doing (what I was doing?) about 2 movements.... one, take a piece of steel and put it in a machine and it came out from the other side... I don't know... it was like that (demonstration) you know... it was terrible (laughing)

Judy How many hours a day?

Toula I really sympathise with the people who have to do it.

Judy How many hours a day?

Toula 8 hours or whatever it was.

Judy You did that same thing for 8 hours a day? ... And you lasted 6 weeks training?... Were you paid while you were being trained?

Toula Ah... I don't remember to be honest.

Judy It must have been so little that it didn't matter!

Toula It must have

Judy Oh dear.

Toula It must have been

Judy Did you have much to do with the Greek community in the early days?

Toula Yes, quite a bit... We were always helping you know to,, mostly we started helping raising money to build a church... the first church ---

Judy Which was?

Toula you know we had dances on different nights...

Judy The first one to be built was ..um.St. Dimitri's?

Toula St. Dimitri's, mmm all the women used to do the cooking you know.. for the dances and um...

Judy What year was that built, do you remember?

Toula Mmm. I don't remember... it's not so easy any more... it's long time, at least over 20 years ago.

Judy How did the people in the community like Australia generally?

Toula Mmm? Sorry I didn't hear you

Judy How did the people in the Greek community like Australia generally. Did they think they were well off here or ---

Toula Oh, some do some don't you know... financially certainly they were much better off here... but of course most people are nostalgic... they missed the old life...ah and it is something that the Greeks, I know they just... they have a certain extra feeling for their own country... they love even the stones there... I know because I've been through that myself you know. (cough) You know, if you come from a village there is nothing and yet you still love the place you know, it's just um... because you were born and grew up there in some way ---

Judy It's your home

Toula The bond is there always.

Judy That comes after ... I think there's a natural period of um settling in and of it all being new and different and then once you get into the boring day to day ----

Toula Mm yes

Judy Then you start to think about ---

Toula Of course

Judy What it was like back home?

Toula I mean I went for a trip after being ten years in Australia and what really spoiled my trip it was that six months before I got there they demolished the house we were-living in...

Judy Oh no.

Toula The good old nice houses with big apartments and they built these awful new flats that they have now um... really spoiled all my , you know, I was looking most forward, to go again in my own home you know, just to get that feeling

Judy That must have been a shock.

Toula It was, I tell you really (pausing)

Judy So your parents had moved ---

Toula Elsewhere ---

Judy and were they still in Athens?

Toula Still in Athens in another sort of units, because we didn't call them units we called them apartments, because they were big... it was bigger than the average house here (a lot of mmming from Judy!!!) ah..those apartments

Judy And did going back... make you wish... that you could perhaps stay there, or.. did you want to come back to Australia after that?

Toula Not really... not if I had my way, I would have stayed.

Judy So why did you come back?

Toula Because I had to (laugh)

Judy How old were you ---

Toula Life is full of priorities and the children you know... I didn't have any means of staying there with two children.

Judy Mmm. How old were they then?

Toula 4 and 6

Judy With two young children was life restricted for you?

Toula Um.. not really. I never found motherhood was restricted... I loved being a mother, I was born to be a mother, so I never found it restrictive.

Judy It wasn't restricted socially for you?

Toula Oh, it probably would if I had a social life, but I didn't have much of a social life (laugh)

Judy I see, right. Did you keep in contact with Greece in the early years?

Toula Yes... oh well... correspondence.. of course. I used to correspond very frequently with my parents, with my brother,.. friends from school place.

Judy And did you see any friends after you went back 10 years after you'd been here?

Toula Yes, I did.

Judy It must have been exciting.

Toula Very exciting.

Judy Mmm. What sort of difficulties did you have fitting in with life in Australia?

Toula Ah... I don't think I had very many difficulties at all, actually, fitting in.... I found it rather easy to fit in.

Judy Language was no problem?

Toula Yes, language was no problem, although I wasn't that conversant with the language but you know, I could the (?) on my own and didn't have to rely on anybody else, um... I didn't have any problems fitting in.

Judy Mmm. No bad experiences in being called names... that's what I want to say.

Toula No. I have never experience that, actually till about...er 3 months ago (laugh) called names.

Judy Were you ---

Toula Yes it's funny, it's funny that's all.

Judy So after all this time ---

Toula Mmm, 'cause I've never been to school here as a little child or I mean, who's called me that it is only that we have a silly tenant upstairs about a couple of months ago ... um .. very nasty sort of people and he called me that as he was laughing one day, that's all ... but he was to stupid to worry about.

Judy Mmm, right...You said earlier that life was very different from life in Greece generally (cough) and apart from the social aspect of going from a large town to a small ... a large city to a small town, what other sorts of things were different? For instance were there any differences in housing? (long pause!)

Toula Housing (long pause)

Judy Did people have houses with backyards as they do here in Australia, in Greece?

Toula Oh yes, mainly talking about Athens because I grew up there ...

Judy Yeh.

Toula Most people were in apartments or if they had a house they had a very small garden um ... I did like this difference you know having a house with a yard around for children to play in - I did like that.

Judy What about traffic in the streets, things like that?

Toula Oh well they were the same you know ... those days before I left the traffic was nil in Athens - very few people owned a car ... so it was quite pleasant ... um so I couldn't really compare because I never drove before and um.

Judy Alright - what about um differences in food, in the general diet! Did you find that people ate differently here?

Toula Oh a bit, yes but I still prefer the Greek cooking.

Judy So do I (snigger)

Judy Could you find all the sorts of things that you used to get in Athens - could you find any at that time...

Toula No but when I first came you couldn't get anything much that I was used to.

Judy In the way of vegetables.

Toula Today yes, there is everything's available everywhere ... not much so then.

Judy And was the ---

Toula But in many ways I find this .. er Australian way of cooking ..er eating well, you know a piece of meat and vegetables and your salad it's a bit more healthier than the richer food, although very tasty ... but a bit rich.

Judy (Lots of Mmm-ing) Are there any differences in the methods of shopping for instance did - in '53 did they have supermarkets in Athens or?

Toula Oh no, of course not - very different situation, small shops.

- Judy Well how ... did they have markets then..... or
- Toula Oh well you could have a vegetable market or a fish market; they have even meat market but the conditions were appalling rather - we didn't have all this nice big refrigeration..... refrégerator ... mmm but the small shops,I always liked the corner shop myself - even now, here I hate supermarkets.
- Judy Mm I don't suppose there were many supermarkets in Newcastle at that stage either.
- Toula No (laugh) it was better before (laugh) before they got too big.
- Judy And what about the climate in Australia. How did that?....
- Toula Oh it was at the time it was much similar in Greece it's a beautiful climate.
- Judy Nice and sunny.
- Toula Yes it's sunny, very nice - a bit more changeable but um...
- Judy A bit more extreme
- Toula Nice and sunny.
- Judy Mmm what about systems? for instance the education system in Australia? How did that differ.
- Toula I always thought it was better in Australia
- Judy Mmm.
- Toula We give more initiative to the student than we do over there ... we still have much better system.
- Judy Mm and the health system?
- Toula You shouldn't ask this question - because of this I get upset if I try to think about it. You don't compare in Australia, is much much better ... The health system over there is absolutely ... non existant. (Shuffling of papers)
Pause
- Judy Right - after you divorced you started looking around for work. You said you did a few jobs round about, yes, when er what was your first permanent job after.
- Toula Er Interpreting, Interpreting translating.
- Judy And where did you work?
- Toula At the Ethnic Affairs Commission.
- Judy And how did you get onto that.
- Toula I saw an add in the paper...
- Judy What year was that?

Toula That was '78/79 I think ... the end of '78 it was I think.

Judy And what did the work entail?

Toula Interpreting and translating as well.

Judy For? Greek people obviously?

Toula For Greek people who could not manage for solicitors, courts.

Judy And how long were you there?

Toula I think about 4 years.

Judy Did you like it?

Toula Very much.

Judy Did you have to have any special qualifications to do that job?

Toula Well you had to have the high school certificate.

Judy And they recognized your Greek certificate.

Toula Yes they recognized my High school certificate. The Education Department had to recognize it.

Judy Any other qualifications?

Toula No, you just sat for tests and if you did well they employed you.

Judy And were the tests in Greek and English?

Toula Yes.

Judy After you'd finished working there, what did, where did you go? ... Why did you leave?

Toula Oh, I had to go overseas and stay for a while so I had to resign there and later on when I returned, I applied to the Migrant Health Unit, Health Department, for an Interpreting job..

Judy And you got that?

Toula Yes.

Judy What year was that?

Toula Well, I started as sessional in '75/'76 and about '77 I got a part time job for 2 days per week and it's now 4 days week.

Judy And you interpret for people in?

Toula Hospitals, doctors mainly.

Judy Do you think it's a good service for migrants?

Toula Absolutely, very necessary.

Judy Do you have a lot of clients?

Toula Mmm, quite a few.

Judy Have you done any other studies in your life?

Toula Mmm, well firstly I did a lot of courses at WEA psychological relations and things like that and then one year I took up University with the Open Foundation scheme and I did that Political and Economics and then I also did a correspondence course with New England University in the Modern Greek - philology you know - literature. I have done bits and pieces you know, but unfortunately it never occurred to me to go and get a degree somewhere.... I thought I was getting too old, you know.

Judy Oh, never too old.

Toula I just wanted to learn more things, you know, but this helped a lot in reaching the language - the English language from shorthand to all those I got into every topic you know, parliamentary to medical to legal to anything for doing all that it just helped me an awful lot - it was really interesting to do.

Judy And what are your feelings now after - how many years in Australia?

Toula 36.

Judy 36 years in Australia? as you're growing older what are your feelings now? Do you ever think about going back to Greece?

Toula In many aspects, if Greece had not changed to the degree it has changed perhaps I would like to go now, but in many other aspects I think I'm very lucky to be here and here to stay.

Judy Your children are both ----

Toula My children of course are both more Australian than anything else - they are happy here and can't see themselves ever going back maybe 'cause as I said life and attitudes have changed so much since then ... it's not the same now. There are hardly any Athenians left in Athens now so

Judy: Well Toula, I think I've exhausted my questions now, so I'll just say thank you very much for talking to us today and hope that the future hold much happiness for you and your children here in Australia.

Greece is a small country with a comparatively large population, which for as long as anyone can remember has been under the rule of other nations. It is a country with a long history of economic poverty, due to the fact that it is not at all rich in natural resources and of political unrest despite the fact that the Greeks were the fathers of democracy. Because of its natural terrain and being surrounded by water, Greece's people have been sea-lovers - something which made the connection with the new country of Australia, particularly the Greek islanders in the early days of settlement.

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

There are some very early Greek immigrants in Australia arriving, albeit involuntarily, about Tuesday 1.00pm - 3.00pm the first Greek settlers. Thereafter, various people came and left a lot coming purely to make their fortunes in the land of milk and honey and return to the homeland with their amassed wealth. There is very little information available on these early Greek settlers. Colonial census did not record them regularly, but C.A. Price has estimated, based on available census returns, that there were about 300 Greek-born in Australia in 1871. Most of these people settled in N.S.W. and Victoria. The city of Newcastle is the second largest in N.S.W. and is a city which took an influx of Greek settlers, the settlement beginning in 1885.

GREEKS IN NEWCASTLE

JUDY GAVRILIS

Probably because of their sea-faring background and general affinity with the sea it was quite natural for the first settlers to seek employment in this area. The type of lifestyle in the homeland constituted village life and because Greece has over 200 islands and a large proportion of its land area and population, many villages are fishing villages. The open-air cafe or tavern which is an integral part of the life of the village is an integral part of life. The influence of this background can be seen in the establishment of the first open cafes by the early Greek settlers in Newcastle. These cafes served a dual purpose "as they were both centres of employment and the residences of the earliest Greek settlers".

DATE - 7th SEPTEMBER, 1989

1. JUDY GAVRILIS

The Australian People
Sydney, 1988

2. JUDY GAVRILIS

The Cultural Express: Greek Settlement in the City of Newcastle
Newcastle, 1988

Greece is a small country with a comparatively large population, which for as long as anyone can remember has been under the rule of other nations. It is a country with a long history of economic poverty, due to the fact that it is not at all rich in natural resources; and of political unrest despite the fact that the Greeks were the fathers of democracy. Because of its natural terrain and being surrounded by water, a lot of Greece's people have been sea-farers - something which made the connection with the new country of Australia, slightly easier for many of the Greek islanders in the early days of settlement.

There are some very early records of Greeks in Australia arriving, albeit involuntarily, and two of whom opted to stay, so becoming the first Greek settlers. Thereafter, various people came and left a lot coming purely to make their fortunes in the land of milk and honey and return to the homeland with their amassed wealth. "There is very little information available on these early Greek settlers. Colonial census did not record them regularly, but C.A.Price has estimated, based on available census counts, that there were about 300 Greek-born in Australia in 1871" (1) Most of these people settled in N.S.W. and Victoria. The city of Newcastle is the second largest in N.S.W. and is one of the centres which took an influx of Greek settlers, the settlement beginning in 1885.

Probably because of their sea-faring background and general affinity with the sea it was quite natural for the first settlers to seek employment in this area. The type of lifestyle in the homeland constituted village life and because Greece has over two thousand islands making up a large proportion of its land mass and population, many villages are fishing villages. The open-air cafe or tavern where fresh seafood is consumed and the men sit around drinking coffee and playing cards or backgammon (tavli) is an integral part of life. The influence of this background can be seen in the establishment of the first oyster cafes by the early Greek settlers in Newcastle. These cafes served a dual purpose "as they were both centres of employment and the residences of the earliest Greek settlers" (2)

1. JUPP James

The Australian People
Sydney, 1988

2. BURNS Alex

The Cultural Impress: Greek Settlement in
the City of Newcastle.
Newcastle, 1988

Based on information collated from the first book written on the Greeks in Australia by John Comino (Ioannis Kominos) certain facts about Greek businesses in Newcastle and surrounding areas have been established. The Zervos Bros. had refreshment rooms at 529 Hunter Street at the turn of the century. Antonis Calopedis migrated to Australia in 1899, being followed by his brother George in 1903. It is believed that in 1910 they went to Maitland where they had two shops (a restaurant and a 'zaharoplasteeon' - cake shop). Peter Mantsaris of Sparta came to Australia in 1907 and was the founder of a tobacco establishment. The Moulos Bros. had refreshment rooms in Singleton in 1911.

Many of these Greeks originated from different parts of Greece but it was not until the arrival of the Ithacans in Newcastle towards the turn of the century that the Greek population began evolving towards a 'community'. The Greek people were probably the first to begin what we know today as chain migration and the pattern of ownership of cafes, restaurants, refreshment rooms etc. was to continue as the major type of employment for the Greeks in Newcastle until the 1950's.

The first Greek settlers were an all-male population who arrived and established themselves, then sent home to bring out brothers, sons, cousins, uncles, nephews etc. Hence the intensity of migration from specific areas of Greece, two of the main ones being Ithaca and Arcadia. 'It was not until after the turn of the century that the first women arrived with three being counted in the 1911 Census' (3)

The first steps taken towards an officially organized Greek community were in 1933 by the 120 Greeks then living in Newcastle. The organization was formed with the intention of keeping alive the religion and language of the people. In the 1920's many of these early settlers had become successful and began to separate their living quarters from their businesses, with the acquisition of land in the Hamilton area and this area has remained until this day, an area highly residentially Greek.

3. BURNS Alex

The Cultural Impress: Greek Settlement in
the City of Newcastle
Newcastle, 1988

With the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Civil War in Greece, many thousands of Greeks took the opportunity to flee the confines of a country ravaged by wars and almost totally economically on its knees. This saw the beginning of the incredible influx of migrants in the 1950's/60's. Newcastle was the recipient of many of these migrants with the Greek-born population escalating from 120 in 1933 to 7000 in the 1950's. These new arrivals originated from many different parts of Greece though most of them were still from islands such as Kefalonia, Mitylene and Samos and with some from mainland Attiki. Despite differences amongst the peoples of the different areas, they were still basically united by a common language and religion, with 96 per cent of the population of Greece practising the Greek Orthodox religion. Many of the new arrivals were 'government assisted' and furthermore almost 45 per cent of them comprised women a fact which helped to balance the great differences in the ratio of females to males.

With the influx of migrants in the 1950's and 60's and the expansion of industry and manufacturing at the time in Newcastle there came a change to the earlier pattern of self-employment in cafes and restaurants of the earlier settlers. 'In 1953 a third of the workforce was employed in trades and labouring occupations as compared with only 9 per cent of the workforce in 1944.' (4) At this time the early settlers proved to be a great bonus for the new arrivals and the people tended to cluster together for support and familiarity, as a security basis in becoming accustomed to the new way of life and often as a shelter from the racial prejudice which many of them experienced then, and unfortunately still do nowadays, from their Anglo-Celtic counterparts. Though the opportunities in the new country were then limitless as compared to the old country, life was not easy and most of the Greeks of today's community in Newcastle have attained material comfort and status through sheer hard work and perseverance.

The Greek Community has two churches in Newcastle, the first St. Dimitri's being built in 1956 and the second, the Holy Apostles Church being built much later in the late 1970's.

Though the building of the second church was due to a split between the church within Greece and those communities outside the country practising their Greek Orthodox religion the Greek community in Newcastle is still, according to many, one unified community. There are many and varied Greek organizations in Newcastle such as the Greek Cultural Group which helps keep alive the traditions and culture of the homeland; the Greek Orthodox Youth Group which covers activities such as the Greek folk dancing; there is the Greek Progressive Workers Association the Greek Council and the Greek Youth Group.

Religious festivals are followed strongly and have helped to cultivate within the general community the ethnic flavour which is fast becoming a way of life. Each year, thousands of people collect to take part in the ceremony of retrieving the Crucifix from the sea, which is flung into the waters off the cliffs of the Bogey Hole. Another remarkably ethnic time is Easter time with many religious ceremonies taking place over the five day period.

'Our News' is the name of a monthly paper which is published in the English language covering social, cultural and general information and the 'Greek Newsletter' is also published monthly, mainly in the Greek language giving information on monthly activities and functions, and on the services of the Ethnic Communities Council, the Migrant Health Unit and Health Care Interpreter Service and the Migrant Resource Centre, services of which the ageing Greek community make great use. Every Tuesday a Day Care Centre is run for the elderly Greek, with provision of a midday meal and other activities such as information programmes and seminars on issues such as health and welfare.

The Greek Community of Newcastle in the 1980's has done much to enhance the ideal of 'multiculturalism' as well as keeping alive the Greek heritage for its youth, and caring for its ageing and elderly citizens. Many members of the Greek community are also prominent members of the general community and all of them continue to support and help each other as well as being instruments of advance and change for the better within our general community of Newcastle.