



**Gold Coaster Androulla Vasiliou on her honeymoon at the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary in 1958, and inset, Androulla (far left) with her mother and siblings in Cyprus in the early 1950s**

was needed was the money and willpower to build it. Androulla had found her calling.

“We got the telephone book and any names that sounded Greek we rang them,” she says. “We said ‘we need your help, we want to form a committee to fundraise to build a church’. We got all the towns in the south of Queensland. Sometimes we go all the way to Murwillumbah, all those small towns, to find people to support us.

“We started at the beginning of 1976 and by Christmas we had enough money to put a slab down for the hall. We put up a tent, got a priest and our first Christmas service was on the slab ... by Easter we had enough money to build the walls and we put on half of the roof and we done the service under half of the roof.”

A teenager at the time, Angela has fond memories of that period, all the more so because it gave her a rare chance to socialise.

“That generation of Greek girls were not allowed to go out so going to these (fundraising) functions, it was like our life,” she says. “I just went to my 30-year school reunion (at Keebra Park) and people there said ‘I remember you, you were never allowed to go out’. All of them (said it) and I thought ‘gee, I don’t ever remember telling them I wasn’t allowed to go out’. They said ‘I used to feel so sorry for you, you were never allowed out’.”

As Angela laughs at the memory of her parents’ strict rules, Androulla feels the need to clarify a point: “Actually, it was more the father.”

“But that was the way all of us were brought up,” smiles Angela. “All the Greek girls my age ... other families were in the same boat.”

With her own Gen-Y baby sitting beside her, one can’t help wonder if the rules have changed for Andriana. “Oh, very much so,” says Angela. “You have to move with the times ... you still have your rules and regulations but the socialising aspect of it has changed. I was speaking to our parish priest and said ‘I can’t raise my children the way I was raised’ and he said ‘no, you can’t, it’s a totally different generation’.”

HAVING their own church was more than just a place to worship for the Gold Coast’s Greek community. It was also a place for the next generation of Greek-Australians to learn about their ancestral homeland.

Andriana grew up attending Greek

playgroups, Sunday school, Greek dancing classes, even a Greek school where children would head once a week to learn the language and history of a country on the other side of the world.

It was similar experience for her mother and with so much of her younger years dominated by her ‘Greekness’, Angela never doubted she would eventually marry someone from the community.

“I always had a feeling I would marry a Greek or Cypriot,” she says after revealing her husband Peter’s family migrated to Australia from Cyprus when he was nine. “That was always my feeling. I didn’t know who it was going to be but it was always inside me. I didn’t say ‘I am going to marry a Greek’. It was just a feeling I always had.”

While her older brother has never married, Angela’s younger sister obviously didn’t have the same feeling about her own life partner. Twelve years Angela’s junior, Soulla married an Anglo-Australian and it’s clear it wasn’t what her parents had expected.

“I’ll tell you the honest truth,” says Androulla. “I’m not going to lie. It wasn’t much (of an issue) for me but Peter, he was ...”

Choosing to speak for himself, her husband interjects: “We preferred her to stay Greek but when he proved who he was we accepted him.”

“Deeply we wanted her to marry a Greek,” confesses Androulla. “She was raised in the community and the dancing group and the Sunday school and everything but she went to Melbourne and they met. They work in the same company ... but we told him ‘we like our daughter to continue with the religion, the culture’ and he said ‘yes, I agree’.”

“And he agreed to christen Greek Orthodox himself,” boasts Peter.

A beaming Androulla confirms the fact. “He become a Greek Orthodox and they baptised the children ... she got an Australian husband and he learnt Greek and their children speak Greek perfectly.”

“It would have been daunting for him to come into a Greek family,” suggests Andrea. “His family’s very quiet, very reserved, very, um, how can we say?”

“Very English Australian,” offers Andriana, his niece.

Angela nods enthusiastically. “Yes, very English Australian. Prim and proper and all that and he comes into us and we’re all ‘AHHHHH!’ All this

craziness.”

“I told him that,” says his mother-in-law. “I sat him down and told him everything. I said ‘with the Greeks, you’re going to go somewhere and they’re going to start yelling and you’ll think they’re fighting but they’re not fighting’.

“I said ‘they’re going to laugh and you’re not going to understand a word of Greek and you’re going to wonder if they’re talking about you’. I said ‘you better think about these things before you say yes’.”

Angela takes over. “I think it was very daunting for his parents too. I don’t know if you’ve seen My Big Fat Greek Wedding where the American parents meet the Greek family? That’s how they were because we’re just loud and if you marry a Greek, you marry their family. End of story. You just have to accept everyone and everyone has an opinion and everyone is part of your life and a lot of Aussies aren’t used to that.

“You might be bickering and fighting but you’re always supporting one another. You can be at each other’s throats one day and the next day you’re fine. It’s all part of life. It’s just the way we are.”

Angela’s daughter is sitting on her left and at 19 years of age, the attractive teenager is inching ever closer to the day when she may want to introduce a boyfriend of her own to her family. Does Mum have a preference what cultural background that young man is from?

“I would prefer they marry Greek,” admits Angela. “I just think it makes life easier within the family because they already know the culture, the language, what we’re about.

“But if they don’t marry Greeks, well, they’re the ones going to marry that person, not me. I just hope they find a partner who is able to accept us.” Angela lets out her loudest laugh of the day. “We’ll accept them but will they accept us? Can they cope with us?”

While you imagine she would prefer not to discuss theoretical boyfriends in front of her grandparents, Andriana says she reckons a non-Greek partner would survive an introduction with her family. “I think they’d be OK,” she says. “We’re not too crazy. It would be a bit of a shock because we’re a pretty loud family but you adjust ... I know other families that would be a bit

harsher (about accepting a non-Greek).”

“There are families stricter than we are, not very many, but the ones that are stricter, their kids have rebelled,” says Angela, her daughter nodding in agreement. “That’s what I’m finding. Parents who are overly strict, the kids have rebelled and they just cause their parents heartache. You’re better off giving them that little bit of leeway and just keeping them close at hand but not so regimented.

“With my (23-year-old) son, he doesn’t want to go to church so I won’t push the issue. I push it if it’s Christmas or Easter or something special but we don’t push the issue. Especially when it comes to religion, you can’t push too much.”

One person who spends plenty of time at the spectacular Greek-Orthodox Church at Bundall is Androulla.

“I built it so I may as well use it,” she jokes before revealing how much pride she has for the way the Greek community has prospered since she dragged her family to the Gold Coast more than 30 years ago.

“I have a lot of pride. I’m really happy we made the decision to come up here. It was like a miracle. We didn’t know anybody. We didn’t have anything to do with the Gold Coast. We come only once before (on our honeymoon). To me it’s like a miracle. I think God brought me here to start working for the church. That’s what I believe.”

And for a woman who at one time thought making that very move had jeopardised her family’s Greek culture, one of the closing remarks of this lengthy conversation must bring a warm glow to her heart. As attention moves towards the freshly baked Greek treats waiting in the oven, Andriana Demetre — the very face of modern-day Greek-Australians — offers a final insight into what it’s like to have the heritage she does.

“When we were younger, I didn’t even think about it,” says the young woman. “It was just the way it is but you actually see you’ve got something. You’ve got a tradition. You’ve got a culture. You can keep that going ... I even have some Aussie friends who say ‘I wish I had a cool background like you’.”

The 2009 Gold Coast Greek Festival will be held on Sunday, July 26, at Evandale Park, Bundall, from 9.30am to 5pm.



**Andriana Demetre, pictured inset with parents Peter and Angela at her christening, was born into a Greek heritage 19 years ago and has truly embraced the culture in recent years**