

Greg Chronopoulos

Greg originally migrated to Australia in 1955 to provide support for his family back in Greece. Now an active retiree, Greg is well known within Sydney's Greek community as a media personality, author and community worker.

THE WAR YEARS IN GREECE

Greg Chronopoulos was born in 1926 in Vartholomio, Ilias, in the western Peloponnese in a district near Ancient Olympia. His earliest memories are of a wonderful and happy childhood but, World War II and the Civil War brought immense hardship and struggle to his family.

For Greece, the war started in October 1940. Initially, the Greeks were in an advantageous position against the Italians, but Hitler attacked Greece in 1941 to assist Italy, and the country was occupied until 1945. Soon after the Germans and Italians left, the Civil War broke out.

Just as the partisan war was coming to an end, Greg, then 21 years of age, joined the army and served as a Reserve Officer Lieutenant in Korea from 1951. While in Korea, he developed two relationships that would later inspire great change in his life. He wrote to thank an Australian Greek woman who had sent parcels of magazines and socks to the Greek troops in Korea, and they became friends. He also started corresponding with a Greek woman with whom he made contact through Reader's Digest and this evolved into a 20-year 'special relationship'.

Upon his return to Greece, Greg realised that his family and Greece in general were still suffering from the impact of war. Being the only boy in the family, he felt responsible for supporting his relatives. Greg made the decision to migrate and send money back home. He wrote to his Australian penpal asking to be sponsored by her and her husband, and in 1955 Greg boarded a ship to Australia to start a new life. He was heartbroken to be leaving Greece, but his sense of duty to help his parents and sisters financially was a priority.

ARRIVING AND SETTLING IN AUSTRALIA

Greg's early years in Australia were difficult and quite unsettling. He lived with his sponsor family in Kensington and attended English classes in the evening, but could only find manual



Greg with his mother Joanna and sister Zoi during their visit from Greece, 1985

work. Also, he felt that the Australian people did not trust 'foreigners' and that he was most definitely 'a foreigner' to them. Being an honest and genuine person, it hurt him to see suspicion of newcomers and prejudice among the Australian people.

In 1956 he sponsored his sister and her fiancée to Australia, and soon after they jointly invested in a house in Rozelle. Greg had left his job as a factory worker at General Motors-Holden and took up employment with Dunlop-illo, but in his spare time he sought a challenge by writing for a Greek newspaper. The writing became his escape from the monotony of the job he was doing, and a way of preserving his Greek heritage and culture.

RETURN TO GREECE

When Greg's sister and brother-in-law bought

a shop in Neutral Bay, it became the catalyst for Greg deciding to re-view his life's choices and dreams:

I had been here for eight years and had no money in the bank because I was sending all my money overseas. I was 30 years of age and wanted to see if I could live back in Greece again, now that the country was better off.

Greg also wanted to meet up with the woman with whom he had been corresponding for many years.

On his journey back to Greece, which lasted two months, Greg had 'the time of his life'. He travelled through the Panama Canal, visited London, Scotland, Continental Europe and then finally arrived in Greece in 1964.

He spent some time with his family and also met with his special friend, but after much thought, he decided that he could not commit to a marriage. With a heavy heart, he left Greece and returned to his new home - Australia.

RETURN TO AUSTRALIA

Back in Australia, he worked extremely hard in positions that were not entirely satisfying. It was not until the mid-70's that he was able to secure work that was more fulfilling, such as at the Greek Consulate, as a travel agent and as a Community Liaison Officer for the Health Insurance Commission (HIC) for 14 years.

While working at HIC, Greg became very involved with his own community by teaching Greek at Macquarie University, writing a column for a Greek newspaper and producing and presenting three SBS Radio programs. After retiring, he worked part-time at the Greek Welfare Centre for 18 months. He felt he had finally found his true vocation, which gave him not only an immense personal satisfaction, but earned him great respect and many devoted friends in the Greek Community in Sydney!

In 1991, Greg sold his house in Petersham and bought his present house in Kingsgrove with a



big garden and a lot of potential to renovate and upgrade.

The house was in very poor condition, but it was cheap and it was a challenge to upgrade it. I finally felt like this was my world. I had a big garden and a nice house in a wonderful Australian suburb.

Renovating the house gave Greg a very important activity upon retirement, 'when one feels inactive'.

MOVING TO THE CANTERBURY AREA

Apart from real estate factors, Greg's decision to move to the Canterbury area was dictated by his strong need to live close to other people with Greek heritage. It gave him the opportunity to maintain traditions and connections with his native land. Local shops stock Greek groceries and products, there are Greek churches at Belmore and Earlwood, the Greek Club at Lakemba, and there is an open and suburban feel to the neighbourhood.

Greg has good relations not only with his Greek neighbours but also with his Australian and Portuguese ones. He is a keen cook and shops in a variety of places. Greg shops at Campsie for general groceries, Lakemba for fish, and most of the local Lebanese shops stock Greek specialities.

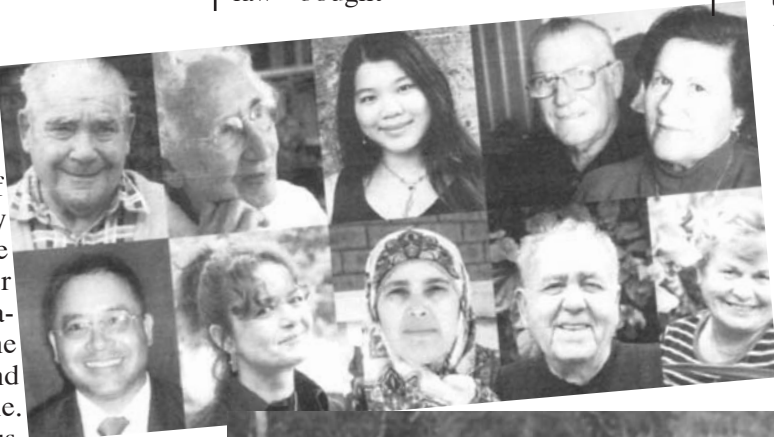
For many years Greg felt his loyalties were torn between his birthplace and his new home in Australia. This conflict has eased with the passing of time. He has one sister in Greece and keeps regular contact with her by phone. In Australia, Greg delights in having regular contact with his other sister and her children who have now grown up.

Since retirement, Greg continues to lead an active life, and he is still passionate about his radio work, Greek language and artistic events. He has written material on Greek history and culture, and has also written many poems and theatre scripts.

Greg is convinced that he is living through the best period of his life despite his 75 years of age:

I am not young, but I don't have to rush like I have rushed all of my life. I don't owe a cent and I am very happy. I have many interests in life. I work for the Greek Welfare Centre, I volunteer for the community, I am involved in artistic things and my garden is my playground.

Article from Canterbury's People Their stories, their lives (2002)



A gathering of project contribution, December 2002