

BOOK LAUNCH

“Journeys of Uncertainty and Hope”

Following his successful photo exhibition, “Home of the Heart: Lesvos and Migration” held last year (November 2009) at the Mytilenian House, Canterbury, Sydney school teacher, Vasilios Vasilas, has compiled the photographs and texts to publish his first book, “Journeys of Uncertainty and Hope” with the subtitle, “Words and Images of Migrants from Lesvos”.

“The photo-exhibition generated so much enthusiasm and interest among our community that there was a feeling the photographs should be compiled into a publication- as a memento of the event. The exhibition’s success really prompted Vasilis to move his work into the next phase- a book,” explained Mytilenian Brotherhood President of NSW, Stavros Kritikos.

What the success of photo exhibition showed at the photo exhibition was there is a lot of interest in socio-histor-

ical research and work within the Greek community. For Vasilis Vasilas, this accelerated sequenced of events has surprised him.

“I cannot believe how quickly things have transpired; this time last year I was content to plod along quietly accumulating material for my website

Details of Book Launch:

When: Friday, June 18, 2010 at 7pm

Where: Mytilenian House,
225 Canterbury Rd, Canterbury

Cost: Free Entry

Light refreshments will be served
All welcome. For more information,
ring Stavros Kritikos on 0428 162 893



(Vasilios Vasilas)

and Hope

JOURNEYS of Uncertainty

Vasilis Vasilas realised how significant the migrant experience remains for most migrants, “Most of the post-War migrants I interviewed have lived in Australia for fifty years, yet the experience of leaving behind parents, family and friends- and Greece itself- still provokes such an emotional response.

Although decades have passed and they successfully settled here- establishing families, homes and businesses- the raw emotion of recounting how they left Greece remains vivid in their memories,” explains Vasilis Vasilas.

Associate Professor, Vrasidas Karalis, of Modern Greek at the University of Sydney will be presenting the book. Two contributors in the book will also recount their stories of migration on the night.

For over four years, Vasilas has been gathering and archiving information and photographs of migrants from Lesvos on his migration website, www.syndesmos.net. Over 650 migrants’ lives have been archived and users can trace a migrant’s life- the family they left behind in Lesvos, when they came to Australia and the family they had in Australia. Both the photo exhibition and its book are a product of Vasilios Vasilas’ work on his website.

on Lesvos and migration, www.syndesmos.net. In the last six months, the photo exhibition on Lesvos and Migration lead to a fundraiser with the purpose to help me with future work on this subject matter. Now, I find myself publishing a book on migration. I am frankly overwhelmed by it all,” said Vasilis Vasilas.

Over 200 photographs and texts depict the post- War migrants’ journey to Australia: farewelling their village and Lesvos, farewelling Piraeus and Greece, throughout their voyage(s) and disembarking in Australia. Moreover, the publication captures the emotional ordeal of the migrants’ experience to leave behind family and homeland, and “gamble” on their decision to travel to the other side of the world for a better future.

Throughout the interview process,



Above: Front Cover of the Book. Mytilene, 1963.
An emotional Stella Tamvakera (nee: Availiotou) farewells her family and begins her journey to Australia.

Early support is heaven for mums

IRENE Margaritis had a five-month-old baby and four other children aged between three and 11 when she was diagnosed with a tumour on her pituitary gland.

With Mrs Margaritis also suffering the ill effects of treatment, she was struggling to cope when she was put in touch with Sutherland Early Support Service.

She was matched with a volunteer who came to her house once a week for three hours.

“In the beginning, when I was sick, she would come and help me out. [She would] wash, fold clothes, clean the house, sweep up,” Mrs Margaritis said.

“Later, when I was recovering, she was someone to talk to. It was just good to have her in the house with me.”

Since Mrs Margaritis, of Caringbah, began using the service in February, tests have revealed her tumour is gone but she has continued to receive visits.

She said it was a pity that a lack of funding meant not all mothers who needed help would get it.

Mrs Margaritis was present last week when the Highfield Committee handed a \$20,000 cheque to the service. Volunteers will be trained for home visits.

The organisation recently trained 25 volunteers, bringing

the total to 90, to visit the 65 clients on the books.

There is always a waiting list but a lack of ongoing state or federal government funding meant the service was almost totally reliant on community and corporate donations.

The service is operated by two part-time co-ordinators, Lina Willmott and Anne Van Vuuren.

Ms Willmott said the \$20,000 would go towards its work with mothers, many of whom were referred from child and family health clinics or elsewhere in the health system as a result of ill health, a disability or postnatal depression.

“We could have a mother



Helping hands: Irene Margaritis (front, left) with Marcus, eight months and Christos, 3. She is with Kaye Thomas (Highfield Committee president) and (back row) Anne Van Vuuren, Lina Willmott and Jan Clarkson (Highfield Committee). Picture: Lisa McMahon

with a broken arm who just needs help for a short while or a baby with reflux or issues relating to prematurity,” Ms Willmott said. “They usually do not have a lot of family support around them.”

She said clients remained on the books for up to 12 months, depending on indi-

vidual needs.

Ms Willmott said fundraising took time from helping families in need.

“It would be great if we could get some recurrent funding from the state and federal governments,” she said.

BY MERRYN PORTER
Article from The Leader