

MARIA & NICK KOSTAS

*This is a transcript of an interview with Maria & Nick Kostas,
with the assistance of their daughter Konnie Kamarotlis,
at their home 42 Langridge St, Middle Park, 3206 on 30 June 2015,
by Anne Miller for the Middle Park History Group.*

Maria's early life in Greece and her arrival in Australia

Maria was born in 1944 into a poor family, living in Yianninna in the village of Ano Lapsista in northern Greece. Here she attended the local school from age 7 to 12, not having been to any kindergarten. Following school Maria did not have a job but assisted on the family farm, where they had their own sheep, cattle and donkeys and grew their own vegetables - tomatoes in the summer and beans, potatoes, garlic and onions. There were not many job opportunities in this area which is why Maria decided to come to Australia, also hopefully to have a better life.

She travelled here by herself in March 1965 by Qantas plane paying £82. A first cousin of Maria's had come previously in 1954. This cousin and his wife sponsored Maria to come to Australia, meeting her at the airport with a sign and taking her to their home in Richmond where she lived for 2½ years. The day after her arrival Maria's cousin took her to a job, also in Richmond, where she opened scallops using a knife. There was a terrible fishy smell there and Maria's fingers used to get badly cut with blood everywhere requiring Band-aids. She only stayed at this factory for 3 months, it was piece work for which she was paid £1 per day. So then, thanks to her friend, she moved to the *Ash* clothing, also in Richmond, where they made trousers, blouses, skirts, etc. Here she finished the garments by cutting off any dangling threads using a small knife. This was a big factory with more than 300 employees. During her lunch break Maria would forego her lunch break to learn to operate the machines, as working on the machines paid better than trimming the threads. She stayed here for 4½ years.

Nick's life in Greece and his arrival in Australia.

Nick was born in 1940 in a village one hour from Sparta in the south of Greece. He did not go to kindergarten (these were not available in Greece), he studied at his local school from age 7 to 15 (??). His family was also poor, so following school he worked on the family farm but wanted to get paid work and a better life. Other people from their villages had already come to Australia which is how they knew about the better opportunities. At this time the Australian government was helping to fund people to come here after these potential migrants had been to school for 3 months, Nick paid £92 to come here. He travelled by ship, arriving in June 1966. Nick also had a cousin living here in Melbourne, who met him at the ship at Station Pier and he lived with them for a few months in Brunswick. He was able to find a job making bricks at a brickworks in Brunswick for 6 months. He had a cousin who lived at 40 Langridge Street (next door to where the Kostas currently live) so Nick came to live with her and obtained work at the chocolate makers Rowntree Hoadleys in South Melbourne where he stayed for 13 years, working as a machine operator on the production line.

Maria and Nick's marriage.

Maria used to work with Nick's first cousin so it was this cousin who introduced them. It was similar to an arranged marriage, they met once and then were engaged. They were married at a Greek Orthodox Church in Burnley Street Richmond in September 1967. Following their marriage they rented the house next door at 40 Langridge Street that belonged to Nick's cousin.

Maria and Nick's family

After they had been married for 1½ years and Maria was 3 months pregnant Maria and Nick bought a house in Phillipson Street, Albert Park. They owned this house for almost 5 years and in 1974 bought 42 Langridge Street where they currently live. Maria and Nick's elder daughter is Panayiota, commonly called Betty, was born in 1969 and christened at the Greek Orthodox Church in Dorcas Street, South Melbourne (just around the corner from Clarendon Street. Maria and Nick think this church has been a Greek church for more than 50 years). Their next daughter, Konstantina, known as Konnie, was born in 1976 while they were living in their present house.

Other family members here or in Greece.

No one else from either Maria or Nick's families has come to live in Australia. In 1979 when Betty was 10 and Konnie 3½, the four members of the family returned to Greece for 6 months to meet other family members. Since then Nick has not been back but Maria did return in 2002 when her mother was ill.

Kindergarten and schooling

Betty and Konnie attended the Civic Kindergarten in Richardson Street (where the library is) and they both went to the Middle Park Primary School and subsequently to Albert Park High School (this secondary school was on the site of the present Albert Park College, it was closed, the buildings demolished and then rebuilt as the College). Konnie thinks that when she and Betty were at primary school the percentage of children from Greek backgrounds was around 50%, compared to other backgrounds.

Living in Middle Park.

In Langridge Street between Page and Patterson Streets there were 7 homes with Greek families, with more around the corner. Maria thought there might have been too many. The reason they came here was that the housing was relatively cheap but in a very nice quiet area near the beach, but their friends were in other areas too.

In the family home Maria, Nick, Betty and Konnie always spoke Greek. In the community they generally kept to the Greek people. They do have Australian friends but it is not the same social relationship as with Greek people who are often in and out of each others homes, this is largely due to the language barrier.

Family celebrations.

On the occasion of Name Days family members and close friends gather to celebrate the occasion of someone's Name Day whether an adult or a child. Sometimes the adults would celebrate all night.

Living in Australia.

Both Maria and Nick are pleased that they came to Australia, particularly as it has enabled them to send money back to their families in Greece. Every week, prior to telephoning becoming much easier and cheaper, they would write to their family and enclose a cheque.

Subsequent job opportunities.

After Maria had her family she returned to work at 2 jobs, one was at a laundrette that was in Mills Street near the corner of Canterbury Road, now this site is apartments. Here Maria worked at ironing the sheets with a big press from 7am to 4pm and then from 5pm to 9pm she worked as a cleaner of the offices at Kraft Foods (in Port Melbourne). At this time Nick worked at a factory on the NW corner of Patterson and Langridge Streets where they made marine rope for ships. Only 6 people worked at this factory, it was owned by a man who lived 2 doors from the Kostas' house in the 2-storey white house (number 36). Nick worked here for 8 years until they closed and he transferred to working as a cleaner in the Kraft factory, firstly on day shift but later on night shift. During this time Nick looked after the children and did the domestic chores. At the weekends Maria also worked at the Lemnos Receptions in Armstrong Street.

Shopping

The Kostas went to the Market and to Coles in South Melbourne to buy their food. Occasionally they go to the Armstrong Street shops but they generally find these shops to be much dearer.

Changes in Middle Park

The property market has become very expensive in Middle Park.

Local Organisations.

Konnie used to belong to the Girl Guides who met at St. Anselm's church hall further along Langridge Street. Maria and Nick did not belong to local groups as they were working, more recently they are members of the Greek Clubs in Port Melbourne and South Melbourne. There is no similar club in Middle Park. Maria had not been a Girl Guide in Greece. Konnie did not belong to any local sporting clubs.



Konnie, Nick, Irene, Maria Maria, Betty Kostas 2014



Maria and Nick Kostas with their granddaughters - Maria(L) & Irene



Nick, Maria, Betty & Konnie Kostas 1982