

# MARTHA AND STEVE ORFANOS

*This is a transcript of an interview with Martha and Steve Orfanos by Anne Miller on behalf of the Middle Park History Group at their home 39A Hambleton Street, Middle Park on 13 June 2015. Eric Orfanos, their son, kindly acted as the interpreter. Their youngest daughter Nikky, Eric's wife Carol, and also Sonya Cameron, neighbour of the Orfanos family and member of the MPHG, were also present during the interview.*

## **Martha's early life in Greece and her arrival in Australia.**

Martha was born on 1 June 1944 in the small town of Pelopi on the island of Lesbos (pron. Lezvos). She then showed us photos of the island, which included Mytilene, the capital of the island. Martha lived with her parents and her one sister. Martha left Pelopi because she wanted to live by herself in a larger city, possibly Athens or abroad. Steve was from the same village so after they were engaged she followed Steve to Australia. If they had been married in Greece it would be more difficult with more paper work than if they came here as single people. Steve had already organised his paper work which would have needed to be redone if they were married in Greece. This was prior to the sponsorship programs. Steve's sister was already here, some family cousins were here and she came looking for more work opportunities. Martha arrived by ship in Australia 2 months after Steve in January 1964, she had travelled here with Steve's sister's fiance who was also from the same village of Pelopi. The Greek and Australian governments were making it easier for people to migrate.

## **Steve's early life in Greece and his arrival in Australia.**

Steve was born 1 September 1932, also in Pelopi. He served time in the army. There were not many job opportunities on the island so Steve wanted to come to Australia for a better life and better opportunities to work. Although WW2 and the effects of the depression were finished the country was still quite low. Steve arrived in Australia by ship in 1963. Steve's sister lived in Ferrars Street, South Melbourne so Martha and Steve went to live with her, there were also another couple and 2 other girls living in the house. All these people were cousins from Lesbos. There were many other migrants living in this area.

## **Martha and Steve's marriage.**

In May 1964 Martha and Steve were married in a Greek church that used to be in Montague Street, north of City Road. The building is a garage now. They did have some family here for the occasion. After the wedding there was a house party at Steve's sister's home but not as elaborate as they might have had back in Greece.

## **Their work history in Australia.**

In Greece Martha attended primary school finishing at age 12 and subsequently attended Home Economics classes 2 days each week for 3 years. She did not work in a Home Economics position. Martha's father worked in a milk bar where Martha and her mother helped.

In Australia Martha started work in a factory where the Casino is now located. Her job was to polish car door handles which had been produced next door and were brought in to be polished. The factory was

owned by Jewish people, there were many factories in this area. Martha's sister-in-law was already working there which enabled Martha to obtain this job. In the 1970s Martha worked in a hair spray factory in Ferrars Street having left the polishing factory in 1964.

When Steve arrived here he first worked at the Tom Piper factory in Port Melbourne where they canned peaches, working there for 3 months before he moved to the Dunlop factory on the corner of Normanby Road and Montague Street in South Melbourne. His job was to 'knead' lumps of rubber and feed them into a machine where they came out as sheets. After 18 years at Dunlop the factory closed, relocating to Fawkner, Steve received a redundancy package. He then went to a plastics factory in Port Melbourne for a year, before moving to Myttons, the sink manufacturers, in Bundoora, where he worked for 13 years.

### **Adjusting to life in Australia.**

Martha thought that living here was really cheap compared to what she was used to or compared to what she had expected. But Martha did miss her family members who were back in Greece and she found the language barrier somewhat of a problem. Martha's parents and her sister have subsequently come to Australia. Initially Martha wanted her sister to accompany her but she was too young, the authorities would not allow it as she had to be 18 to emigrate and Martha needed to have her own home for it to be possible. Then they had the idea that the family would come over together and the parents would leave if they did not like it. But eventually the parents did decide to stay.

### **Living in Middle Park**

When Martha first arrived in Australia she lived in Ferrars Street, later in Eville Street near Sol Green Park in South Melbourne in a rented house where the family continued to live after her parents arrived from Greece in 1966. In 1979 her parents subsequently bought that house. In 1973 Martha and Steve had bought the house at 39A Hambleton Street (not the house that is there presently) for \$39,000 which they thought was expensive at that time. This was Steve's decision to purchase the property, houses in Middle Park were a little more expensive than in South Melbourne. There was a property boom at this time and Steve wanted to make an investment. Initially when Martha and Steve came to Australia they planned to make money and return to Greece. But later, after the children had settled at their schools and Christie was ready to commence university, also because other family members were here, they decided to stay in Australia so they purchased property.

### **Martha and Steve's family**

In 1964 Martha's first child, Kristy, was born, Martha had stopped work as soon as she was aware that she was pregnant as she had trouble with morning sickness. Kristy was followed by Eric in 1971, his Greek name is Eleftherios, after his paternal grandfather, although he has 3 different first names. Apparently Kristy liked *The Bay City Rollers* where the lead singer was Eric, so that is how Kristy's little brother became Eric! Maria, the next child was born in 1976 and Nicky in 1980. Kristy, Eric and Maria were all born when the family lived in Eville Street, living together with Martha's sister and her 2 sons and the grandparents, making

a total of 11 living together. Living together with other generations is unusual for Australians, Eric commented that some Indian and Asian migrants live like this now. After Martha's parents arrived her mother was very busy helping in the house and with the children. Eric commented that at one time it seemed to him that his grandmother was running a kindergarten for all the cousins of the family! Martha had returned to work by this time at a chocolate factory, Hoadley's, in Kingsway and subsequently to another chocolate factory, Ballantynes where she worked for 20 years putting the chocolates into boxes. When they were moving to Bundoora Martha took a redundancy package and retired at 58 years of age. Martha's father was working at Dunlop.

### **The children's schooling**

All the Orfanos children went to the St Peter and Paul Primary School in Montague Street. Christie, the eldest, commenced her secondary education at Kilbride College, an all-girls Catholic school on Beaconsfield Parade for one year after which the school closed. The buildings are still there. So Christie transferred to Kilmora in Hawthorn, also an all-girls Catholic school. Martha wanted her to go to an all-girls school but many schools that they looked at would not take Orthodox students, only Catholic students. This included Presentation College in Windsor (PCW), but this school later changed this ruling, so that Maria and Nicky went to PCW for their secondary schooling. Eric went to the Christian Brothers College in Dandenong Road, over the road from PCW. When asked whether his upbringing had been stricter or more demanding than other Australian boys Eric thought not, as he was the second child in the family. He thought that a first child would experience this as the parents were new to the Australian way of life, so that the treatment of Nicky compared to that of Kristy was a lot less strict and Nicky had much more freedom. [Martha claimed that she was too old and couldn't be bothered!] The four Orfanos children all went to Greek School, initially Kristy went to Elwood and later to other places. One of the locations was in the hall of the Anglican church of St. Silas in Bridport Street, Albert Park. The location of these schools kept changing, moving around to wherever they could rent a suitable spot. In their home the family spoke only Greek. Eric did find that going to Greek school was rather a waste of time, although they were taught formal Greek, including reading and writing the language.

Martha had not known that it was necessary to enrol Kristy in kindergarten so Kristy skipped this. There was a kindergarten near where they lived in South Melbourne but it burned down and was not replaced, thus Eric did not go to kindergarten either.

### **Changes in Middle Park.**

Although Martha and Steve had purchased the house in Hambleton Street, they let it for awhile and came to live here in about 2004. At this time Nicky was living here with her parents but the other 3 children were married. During these 15 years they have not seen much change in Middle Park.

### **Shopping**

Since living in Middle Park Martha still shops at the South Melbourne market and in Clarendon Street, she

prefers to stick with what is familiar and where there are more shops.

### **Membership of local organisations**

Eric has been a member of and played with the Albert Park Soccer Club for 6 years, and for a year he was a member of the Middle Park Tennis Club (the one in the park near the Middle Park station). Steve, Eric and Carol's son, plays with the Middle Park Soccer Club and their daughter, Martine plays soccer with the South Melbourne Soccer Club at 'the pits'.

### **Comparison of schooling for the grandchildren compared to that of the children**

Eric's cousins used to go to Albert Park High School where Eric thinks the percentage of Greek students was above 90%, he thinks that now at Albert Park College it would be 5%. These would have been pretty much the same proportions at the Primary School. Eric's children went to the Middle Park Primary School for their primary education, Steve is still there, while Martine now goes to Albert Park College.

### **Returning to Greece**

In 1981 Martha and the 4 children travelled back to Greece to visit the family, and in 1999 Steve revisited Greece to sell some land. Eric and Carol visited Greece for a holiday in 2000 before they had their family.

### **39A Hambleton Street**

Carol commented that this house was occupied by members of Martha and Steve's family, firstly by Christie in the early 1990s and later by Eric and Carol in 1997.



Orfanos Family - Niki, Steve, Martha, Maria, Christie & Eric.



Dad Steve, Front my sister Christie, Mother Martha,  
Auntie Toula, Aunty's Husband.