

CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
REDFERN, WATERLOO AND ALEXANDRIA
TRANSCRIPT

Name: Vivi Germanos Koutsounadis

Date: 13 June 1995

Place:

Interviewer: Sue Rosen

TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **SR:** Interview with Vivi Germanos Koutsounadis, 13th of June 1995.

Hello, Vivi.

VK: HI.

SR: Vivi, Where were you born?

VK: I was born in Chios which is a little island in Greece and I came to Australia in 1954 at the age of nine years of age. And first we live at Glebe with my family - my uncle had a very big house and we lived in the house – and then three years later we bought the shop in Redfern called the Chios Milk Bar which is still there at the corner of Redfern and Regent Streets Redfern.

SR: What brought your family to Australia?

VK: Well, my father used to be a merchant seaman because from the islands where we come from most of the men are really with merchant ships. So he was away for about five years and when he returned back to the island he decided it was better for us to be all together. So my uncle used to be here before the war and so he sponsored us and we came to Australia.

SR: And how many of you were there in the family?

VK: Well, there was two brothers, myself and my father and my mother and my two brothers are younger than myself. And we lived in this very big house in Glebe. Now it's been made into an art school and it was really very interesting because there were about ten families, ten Greek families, with husbands and wives and uncles and cousins and children; it was really a very interesting experience.

2.02 **SR: Sounds great. Did you enjoy it?**

VK: Yes. Well, yes, we did because for example every weekend everybody used to pool food, then drinks and everything so that we can all get together and have a social because that was the only social life that they had. People were working very hard in the factories and so at the weekends – well, there wasn't much of entertainment anyway at that time. I remember the movies were on Saturday and then on Sunday there was nothing because everybody had to go to church. So people – well, migrant people – who didn't have families and friends used to stay together in their home and it was really very interesting. And so I remember that I was the eldest of about eight children in that household and I used to take them to school every morning because I was the eldest and there used to be trams so we used to get into the trams and go to school and it was a big responsibility for me because I have to look after them. And so, yes, that was the socialising. And sometimes we would go to the movies on Saturday and in Redfern where our shop was there used to be the Lawson Theatre – now it's the TNT Building - yes, it was pulled down and they used to have the

matinees. And then my uncle used to have the shop before we bought it so there used to be a lot of people going to the shop to buy lollies and milkshakes and ice creams and so on because the cinema didn't have a shop of its own so they had to come around the corner.

4.03 And we used to help in the shop, in my uncle's shop as well, and it was really interesting because the shop was a very good education for us. Redfern at the time that I was young used to be the central point where most of the migrant people came, mainly because of the fact that there were heavy and light industry and manufacturing industry in Botany, Mascot, Alexandria, all of those area whereas now, of course, most of them are big warehouses. So a lot of the migrants who were unskilled and were brought here so that they can develop the country – or what I call “factory fodder” – used to find jobs there. And so a lot of people, most of them, couldn't speak English so they used to come to the shop and they used to sit down and, you know, look worried and sometimes crying because they couldn't communicate, they couldn't find jobs, they couldn't find accommodation. So I remember me and my two brothers who learned English very quickly, because children pick up the language quickly, we used to help them. We used to take them to the factories looking for jobs or we used to have friends who had houses and we used to introduce them so that they can rent a room and I believe that that had an effect on my career choice because of the fact that I was involved from a very young age with helping people and looking at the difficulties they had and the problems they were experiencing, the loneliness and lack of services to provide them with information.

6.01 I think that had a lot of bearing on my decision to become, well, social worker and psychologist I am but to work in the social welfare in ethnic affairs field so that we could make the immigration process much more humane for people. And also my parents, for example, they worked in the shop from six in the morning to twelve midnight seven days a week – we never closed the shop holidays or anything – and they did that for thirty years and it was really a hard life. I think eventually they became economically viable but at a great cost to them personally and socially and otherwise.

SR: They were incredibly long hours.

VK: Yes. So it was at a great cost to them and I think they did that because in Greece after the war there was a lot of poverty, there was warfare and also very poor, so in order to give us a better life, the children, they decided to migrate and come to Australia which is about thirteen thousand miles away. And I remember we came by ship at the time

because there were no planes and it took about twenty seven days. And it was an Italian ship so we didn't like the meals because they cook some Italian meals and there were quite a lot of Greek migrants in the ship so my father who used to be a merchant seaman decided to go and see the captain and ask him to cook some other meals because people were not eating and they were getting sick in the ship. So they really work really hard in order to provide us with a better life.

8.02 **SR: What happened when your father went and saw the ship's captain about the food?**

VK: Yes. So he said to the captain and the captain said "Well, what do you want to cook, what do you want us to cook?" So my father told him some of the dishes that the Greek people like so they did fix up the food and it was better. But it was a long journey and I remember it – well, I was quite young then – I used to play with the children, with the other children and with my brothers and we used to get seasick. So my father said to us "You must eat, you must eat. It's very important for you to eat even if you get seasick" so I remember that. And also they gave us bananas but we never saw bananas before so we used to throw them away.

SR: Really?

VK: Because in Greece in the village, you know, never saw bananas. At the time, back in 1954 we came from a village, from a little village where people ate what they produce and so the types of fruit were very limited so we really didn't know what bananas were. And so when we came here I remembered we couldn't speak a word of English. We went to Fremantle, the ship stop at Fremantle, and then we had to catch a train to come all the way from Fremantle to Sydney. And I remember that they used to bring us sandwiches and Greek people never had sandwiches before so no one ate sandwiches.

10.09 Then again there was somebody who could speak English and they said "Look, these people don't know what sandwiches are". So they used to bring the trays and used to take them back so what they did then was they used to stop at various places and we could go out and buy some fruit or some other food because the food was so strange to Greek people and luckily some of them had brought some bread and other food from Greece that they could bring out and they ate some of that. So the train journey, it was a very long train journey and then we came to the Railway Square and the railway station.

SR: At Central?

VK: Railway Square and my uncle came and picks us up because my uncle used to live at Glebe and took us to the house and it was good because he was helping, you know, he was sort of helping us and there was somebody who spoke the language but it was still very difficult. And I remember when I went to school I couldn't speak a word of English so I was dumped in the classroom and I was expected to perform, to speak English and write and everything and there were no English classes that we could go so a lot of times we used to cry every morning because we didn't want to go to school because it was so strange. And also I was the first migrant child in the school and everybody thought I was all odd or landed from somewhere else.

12.10 **SR: What school was that?**

VK: It was Glebe Primary School because we live at Glebe at first. And so the school was up to second year of high school and so after my parents bought the shop three years later I continued to go there and they wanted me to continue on because they had high expectations from us to become educated because they themselves were not educated. My mother couldn't read or write in Greek. My father finished primary school and his father had eleven children and he was very bright and so the schoolteacher at the village had told my grandfather to take him to high school. Now, there was only one high school in the island and you have to move from the village to go to the island and live there. So anyway my grandfather took him but it required for him to pay a certain sum of money for my father to live somewhere so that they can look after him, you know, like board and look after, and so my grandfather couldn't afford it so he put my father to work in a shop and he really had a terrible time – he was twelve years old. And my mother left her family when she was seven years old and she went as a companion to this wealthy lady in the centre of the island as well but she had a very good time because the woman was very good to her. She was very wealthy and had big fields and so my mother used to work there and also help her. So she really had a very important position and also the elderly lady taught her to count and to write a little bit but then she forgot.

14.13 But she left from there when she was – I think she stayed there for fifteen years. She was about twenty years of age when she left from there and she met my father and they became engaged and they were engaged for seven years because my father had five sisters that he had to marry off because in the Greek custom the girls marry first before the boys so he had to marry them off and then they married. So when they came here, they came here because they knew that they had to work hard and they worked in the shop and we grew up in the

shop. We used to help them with cleaning up and also serving and so on and so forth but as I said before it was a good education, the shop. Also very fascinating because so many people came there and you could see different people, different characters, different personalities and it was really very interesting and the shop was really very popular. It was a very good shop because it used to be outside the bus stop – the tram stop, used to be trams before in Redfern – the tram stop and the station was behind so people came in the morning, in the afternoon and in the night-time when they changed the shifts because a lot of people worked shifts at the time. They just had to work, you know, and also in the '50s and the '60s there was the boom years so it wasn't difficult to find work if you were prepared to work hard and a lot of people work hard.

16.17 And so the house where we live was upstairs on top of the shop and it was very noisy I tell you with all the big trucks coming up full of goods because during the those times there was only the trains and trucks and so on that carried goods because it was very expensive to fly most of them. So day and night the big trucks, vroom, vroom, up and down and up and down so we had to become used to the noise. Now you've got the planes, of course, and we had the planes. Well, the planes started later and so, yes, it was interesting.

SR: We're just going back to sort of when you first came here. Your parents bought the shop from your uncle?

VK: Yes.

SR: And what brought your uncle to Australia – when did he come out?

VK: He came to Australia just before the war. He was a merchant seaman and I think the ship that he was in was bombarded during the war and he was stranded in I think it was in Papua New Guinea and then after that he came to Australia and he bought the shop, the shop there at Regent Street, and he used to make chocolates and everything because he had all the equipment there because before they didn't have chocolates.

18.02 **SR: Homemade?**

VK: Well, that's right. Like all the production there, mass production of chocolates so he used to make homemade chocolates and the shop was really patronised by a lot of people and I remember he used to serve a lot of chocolates. We had some customers who used to come there for years and years, every year and also during Eastertime. That

was the best time, when we have the Easter eggs and people used to come and buy them from different places because then there were not too many shops, you see, I mean the big Woolworths and Coles although there was Wynn's, Wynn's, the store. Not very far where now there is the Department of Social Security and the College it used to be Wynn's but it used to be more of a departmental store rather than selling chocolates and things. So the small corner shops were really there and it started becoming the big shopping centres in the, I would say, middle '70s when the big retailers, you could no longer get one or two boxes because it wasn't paying them to come around so the big shops were buying big quantities and they could sell the things cheaper than the shop so people just went. But I think you've lost that personal touch with the corner shop because I remember my mother and I used to counsel people and talk to them about any problems they had and information, provide information to them whereas now it's so impersonal, you know, the big departmental stores.

20.17 Well, in the Greek community at the time too there were not many social outlets where girls, especially young girls, could go to meet boys and so on and so forth so because we knew some families we used to introduce the young people so they can get married and so my father became groomsman and godfather to all the babies and he had about five and I had another five. And so because you see life was so restricted, especially girls, in the Greek culture and at the time then it was much more strictly adhered to the girls were not allowed to go out by themselves. They have to go with their family or friends or very close relatives, otherwise the community will gossip about them, that they were not good girls and so their prospects of marriage will suffer. And I remember when I was a teenager I wasn't allowed to go out by myself; I had to go either with my parents or with my brothers or with my uncles or with my cousins. And because it was a different culture to the Australian culture – you know, the Australian girls could have boyfriends and go out – and, of course, you didn't understand why when you're young the parents will say “No, you can't go can't go” and then you say “Why?” it's because “You can't go out”.

22.14 All the boys went out and the girls were not allowed to go out so it caused a lot of friction between the families so what my parents had to do is they had to take us, had to take us out. And it took many years for me to persuade and change my parents' attitudes about girls because the roles of the male and female were quite different. The males had more freedom to go out and they were the head of the family and I remember my brothers were bossing me around, you know, of what clothes to wear and not wear and whether to make up or not.

So, yes, it was really funny but eventually, though, I learned to educate my parents and my brothers and to say that it wasn't wrong to go out and so on. But I think because of the fact that they couldn't speak English and because all the time they heard on the radios – well, there was not much television at the time but the radio – that people were killed and so on they were afraid to let us go out. And so it was a bit restrictive but I think in a way though it was good because I concentrated more on my studies and at the time back in 1950s my parents, I think, were really advanced and progressive in their thinking to the fact that it doesn't matter whether you were a boy or girl it was very important to get an education.

24.12 So they were really encouraging me and my brothers to become educated because they said "We don't want you to work in the shop seven days a week, holidays and never close for so many hours but for you to go and educate yourself so that you can get a better life for yourself" but also because of the fact that they had hard lives themselves they really appreciated that you have to give back something to the community and to the society so they encouraged us to do voluntary work and to help people and they did themselves as well. I know my father quite often gave people money when they came and they didn't have any money or they wanted to sponsor their families or wanted to buy a house. And when I became a welfare worker and work in South Sydney Community Aid which is about one block down, most of my referrals came from my mother and my father. Because people went to the shop and they were looking for information and everything they said "Oh, you go to my daughter and you get help from her" so they used to do that. But also my father used to be involved with the Greek community because, you see, back in those days there were only three [Greek] churches in Sydney and that was the one at Bourke Street, the one at Paddington and the one at Abercrombie Street in Redfern and so the church to a certain extent was important because it brought people together and also brought them together so that they can form communities.

26.03 I think the community was important to cushion the culture shock and also to maintain the identity and more importantly for the first generation kids to identify with their Greek background, which was very important because of the fact that the children had to maintain the language, the mother tongue, to be able to communicate with the parents because the parents didn't have opportunities to learn English at the time. There were no English classes anyway and then when there were some English classes they were in the night-time from seven thirty to nine o'clock and imagine working from five o'clock in the

morning to five o'clock in the afternoon and going home to prepare food and the children and everything and then to have the will and the energy to go and learn English. So it was very limited, the English classes, so it was really important for the children to for example speak Greek so that they can communicate with the parents because if they couldn't communicate there was a situation – and there were situations – where the parents spoke Greek and the kid English and there was no communication whatsoever.

SR: That actually happened?

VK: Oh, yes. It still happens. I mean it still happens and it is a big problem. Well, at the time it was even more because there were no ethnic schools, there were very few ethnic schools, so this is why my father became involved in the Greek community and also in the brotherhood. We had a brotherhood from our island where we got all the people from the island to come together and we had dances and barbeques and functions at different houses so that we can meet and it was through the efforts and through providing money and donations that they built up the communities and the churches and now we've got so many churches, of course.

28.06 But in those days there were not too many Greeks. There were some Greeks who were here before the war but then most of them came between the '50s and the '70s, the large migration from Europe where we had about four million people migrated here in Australia and quite a large number of Greek people. So we became involved with that as well because they used to take us to the functions and we used to help and participate in the process.

SR: All right. Well, what kind of a kid were you?

VK: Well, I think that because I got into responsibilities from very early age – I was born during the war in 1943 and my brothers, we're just sixteen months between each other – so I remember my mother didn't have any food to give us and she used to get the wheat and soak it and then take all the heart out and then bake it in the oven and make it with water so that she can give to us but she also breastfed my two brothers so she was breastfeeding us up to two years old so my father had to leave and go into merchant shipping in France so he took all the money that they had.

30.23 So it was really difficult because we had a hard time and my mother was trying to work in the fields so that she provide for us until my father would send her some money so I got into responsibility in life from very early age because when my mother was there I had to look after my

two brothers and also because of the hardship we had I would say I was much more closer to my mother and I really understood the difficulties that she was facing. So when we migrated here I also had the responsibility. So, yes, because of that hardship I think I was more serious and took responsibility and also because of the situation we were in we really didn't have any toys or play, really. I couldn't play because I was helping my mother in the house and looking after my brothers. So I would say I was serious and very conscientious and trying to study so that I can better myself and also my father's and mother's expectations.

32.01 Now, because I had so many responsibilities I was more serious and trying to work hard so that my mother's and father's expectations to be met because I was seeing so hard that they worked and all the hardship that they were going through for us. I liked to dance so we used to go to Greek dances a lot and I used to dance but also I used to be involved in helping with the work, you know, setting up the hall and selling tickets and all of that, fundraising and raffles and everything. And I would say, yes, I didn't have much of a childhood life, take it at that.

SR: You said everybody was working hard. Did you feel that the immigrant people had to work harder than the Australian people that were here?

VK: Well, I think so because if you uproot yourself from your home and you come to a strange land – because, let's face it, we really didn't have very good immigration programs organised so we can tell people what they will expect and also to prepare the Australian people about all these different people that were coming to the country so on both sides – so the migrant people had to set up the household, they had to find a house, they really had to work very hard because some of them came with the understanding they would go back but then it becomes harder and harder when you get married and you have children to unsettle yourself again. So they had to work really hard, yes, with no exceptions really hard because most of those people were really unskilled people.

34.04 The educated people didn't come. Some of them did, of course, because of political problems or because of economic problems or because of family and then their qualifications were not recognised so you had chemists and doctors and people who had to work in the factories and that was really demoralising for those people. But on the other hand too I think with any immigration program the migrants who come are the ones who go into the hard manual jobs and then the

people who are there, like the Australians, become up the ladder in the administration and foreman levels. And now some of the Asian migrants now are taking over those jobs and some of the Greek and Yugoslav and other people who came before are going up too. So you can see the movements; I think this is the immigration process. But I think also because Australian people were not prepared, they were under the impression that these people came here and they had to change, they had to learn English and they have to assimilate and not maintain their languages and cultures and so on so sometimes it was really rough. I remember when we bought the shop there were hotels and wine bars, there were hotels, practically every corner there was a hotel and where we were there was the hotel where the TNT Building is now, there was a wine shop directly across, there was another hotel one block down, there was another hotel another block down so in that street there were about, I would say, seven or eight hotels.

36.04 So what happened every afternoon because, you know, the hotels were open until about six o'clock or seven o'clock, you see all the police paddy wagons coming to pick up all the drunks. All the drunks were lying on the street and also because they were drunk they used to come into the shop and wanted to pick a fight. So we had a lot of fights all the time and we tried not to get my father to become involved so we used to go and talk to them and sometimes they would break the glasses, the showcases, and the police will come and so on and so forth. I mean you could say it was a rough area but I think it was because people really didn't have any other alternatives. I mean the lifestyle that was then was really very strange to the migrants who used to be more with family gatherings - there was no hotels. I mean there were hotels but you had food with the drink and the hotels then you just stood there and drank one after the other until you dropped or until closing time. So it was really strange to the migrant people who were used to having all the family sitting together with food - they drank as well - and festivals, they used to have festivals, religious ones as well as community ones. I mean there were no festivals. Sometimes there were the parades, you know, on ANZAC Day and - well, Australia Day didn't start having celebrations until very recently but we had the Empire Day and Queen's Birthday with crackers and everything.

38.10 Of course now you don't have any crackers but that was the entertainment and also football and games, not soccer, of course. In the beginning, soccer wasn't that popular so at school the boys, my brothers, were both rugby players and rough and so and so forth so they used to come bruised and cut and muddy and everything and my mother used to say "What's this, what's this? Why don't you play

soccer?" and there was no soccer because it was mainly football. And so it was very different, the life was very different, and migrant people really missed the festivals and everything and so they tried to do the dances on the Saturday so that they can have some entertainment. So you could hear all the languages of the world, the wogs, dagos and so on and so forth until, I think, the Menzies government passed a law that you couldn't call people "dagos" or "wogs".

SR: Menzies?

VK: Was it Menzies, during Menzies' times? No, was it after? I think it was after, it was after, but at some stage you could have redress if you were called a wog and a dago and a reffo and whatever.

SR: I think that would have been really relatively recently, like when we've sort of got anti-discrimination legislation.

40.00 VK: The anti-discrimination, yes.

SR: That must have been late '70s, I'm pretty sure.

VK: That's right, because the Anti-Discrimination came in the '80s, I think, that's right, and that was not to call people – no, I think it was during Whitlam, during Whitlam's government, that's right, because the Menzies government, all the Liberals were there for twenty three years so this is why we had all this conservatism, yes, and no immigration plans.

SR: Was it always an insult to be called a wog or a dago or was it always an insulting term? Like now people, you know, there's that show about wogs on something.

VK: *Wogarama.*

SR: *Wogarama* or something.

VK: Yes. Well, at that time I think it was, you know, it was like an insult. Well, I remember at school I was called that.

SR: Dago?

VK: If the girls wanted to get nasty with me they would call me that and I didn't tolerate it. I was really upset with that because I felt that just because I come from another country it doesn't mean that I'm not the same.

SR: So the term was always belligerent with that?

VK: It was done in a nasty way, you know, if they wanted to be nasty to you. And I remember one time when somebody came in the shop and started swearing and calling us so and so forth and telling us to go back to our own country and I said "Well, it's not our fault. Menzies brought us here, Mr Menzies brought us here so you go and complain to him" because that was true. When migrants from Britain didn't want to come here any more because after the war Britain was building itself up, they look for sources in Europe, Greece and Italy and all these other countries. although the Italians were here during the war, and Yugoslavia, former Yugoslavia and so on.

42.19 So they were bringing people in and they really didn't care whether they had any qualifications or not. The only qualification was that you were strong, you were of childbearing age and you had young children, that was the only thing, and just passed the medical and that was it. Yes, so people felt, the migrants felt that they were in the country and they should be welcome and not treated as though they were second-class citizens because that's what happened, they were treated like second-class citizens. And it's only very recently, I mean in the recent years, that I think because of multiculturalism and so on migrants have their rights and we are all in it together and we live harmoniously together so in those days it was really difficult. For example, remember because I was plump all the time it was very difficult to find dresses because most of the dresses were for slim people, most of the Australians were slim.

SR: Really?

VK: Yes. And because I had a big bust I've always found a fit me up to here and then I was up to here and really couldn't find any clothes so we had to get a lady, a friend of ours, to make the clothes. And to find shoes, that was another hard thing too. I mean the fashions were not really, well, you know, not European type. There was just - - -

44.09 **SR: Thongs?**

VK: That's right, yes. And food, oh, that was the other one. I mean fish and chips wrapped up in newspapers and steak and eggs and onions, all of it together in one big plate and topped on each other so I think the migrant people really had a lot of effect on food, the first one, and a lot of the milk bars and a lot of the cafés were Greek people or Italian people or migrants and they introduce some of their foods. And now we have the Chinese and pizza and we have every type of imaginable restaurant but at that time it was really hard to find some food.

SR: About the cafés, though, my memories of Greek and Italian cafés which I can remember from the '60s, they sold hamburgers and steak sandwiches and Chiko rolls and none of them where I came from sold anything that remotely resembled Italian or Greek food.

VK: Because they were not game enough to do it.

SR: I was just going to say that they all seemed to produce the same stuff but people did in the city.

VK: Of course, yes. But, yes, slowly people became much more adventurous with food.

SR: Well, you would have had Greek clientele I guess as well.

VK: That's right. Well, there were some Greek restaurants. I remember the only Greek restaurant in the city was the Athena Restaurant and that was down in Bathurst Street in the city and most of the Greeks went there to eat anyway. It was a treat to go down to the city to eat.

46.01 That's the other thing. People just couldn't afford to travel and to go out so sometimes we found it as a treat to go down to the city and go to the Greek restaurant and have something to eat.

SR: Well, what sort of food would you sell in your café?

VK: In the Greek restaurant?

SR: No, in your café.

VK: In our café?

SR: Did you introduce foreign foods there?

VK: We used to have sandwiches and toast, just the I - - -

SR: This is the normal Aussie stuff?

VK: - - - normal Aussie stuff, that's right, but we cook Greek food for ourselves. So sometimes customers used to come and say "Oh, what a beautiful smell. What are you cooking?" and my mother says "I'm cooking this" and they say "Oh, can we try a little bit?" So I think slowly in this way people began to experiment and to try Greek food and I think food was the first contact between the migrants and the Australians, you know, that brought them together.

SR: And did your family gradually introduce Greek things onto the menu in your café?

VK: Well, we didn't have a kitchen to have Greek food.

SR: It wasn't that sort of café?

VK: No, it wasn't a café. It was more of a milk bar, yes, but we did introduce Greek sweets, though, like baklava and and pasties and a lot of the Australian people bought that, bought the Greek sweets.

SR: You were living above the shop. So there was yourself and your two younger brothers who were just a little bit younger than you and your parents. Did you actually own the premises or were they rented premises?

VK: No, no, the premises belonged to the Bank of New South Wales and we were renting because the Bank of New South Wales used to be next to it.

48.05 **SR: Right.**

VK: And I must say before they had any interpreters we used to do most of the interpreting for them because they didn't have any people who spoke another language. So I remember all the time they used to come next door and ask us to go interpret for Greek people and also my mother used to be like an accountant, keeping books and depositing money that people used to give her because the bank was closing and "You must introduce a lot of business to the bank". And then eventually they decided they didn't want the building and we bought it in 1983, yes, and now we rent it after my mother and father retired because just couldn't continue any more.

SR: And did you get treated well by the bank – were they good landlords?

VK: Well, you know, the big businesses. When they were small they did but then afterwards when they expanded and became big but we used to remind them about it, about the fact that we took so many customers there for loans and everything. And then they employed bilingual people and Greek people because before they didn't have anybody and it was a highly migrant area. See, that's another one of the things that took a long time for businesses and banks and so on to realise the value of languages because I think we had some sort of hangup about other languages and the monolingualism that pervades. And there's so many languages, we've got ninety languages spoken in Australia by so many people and we're really not developing them.

50.02 It's only very recently that we had community languages in the schools and if we are to compete in the international sphere this is so valuable to us but also so valuable in relation to trade because you've got the

people here from the countries who are the best ambassadors in the country of origin for business. But I think it took a long, long time for Australians to come out of that insular xenophobia, narrow-mindedness and I think Australia is losing a lot. We have a lot to offer in relation to knowhow and how we manage our diversity and all the things that we have here but we have some sort of a very low self-image of ourselves and we're not selling ourselves overseas and we have quality, you know. So we need to sell ourselves more and also I think because people are travelling now, they are being more exposed but we really need to sell ourselves more and to capitalise on the markets and on the people that we have here because we have an unlimited resource of people. I mean any country's resources are its people but we are not really developing that and especially our migrants. I mean it really breaks my heart when I see people who have so many qualifications from overseas and experience to come here and their qualifications not recognised and all the skills going down the drain and we are importing people from overseas to do those things instead of training our people here, you see. It is changing a little bit. We are getting more in the international sphere.

52.00

For example, in '92 I went to Europe and I participated in the 25th International Congress of Psychology because I'm a trained psychologist but I work in the ethnic and childcare field because of the need – that's how I entered into it – and I presented a presentation. There were some other Australian presenters there. Our work was really great compared to the American and Canadians who are always the ones that know everything; but they don't. This is the whole thing and I think it's really important for us to do that, to send people overseas at conferences and so on. And we have developed through multiculturalism a lot of skills that we can contribute to other countries where they have multi-ethnic and so on minority grouping. And some of the legislation we have is world first, our national agenda for multiculturalism for example which encompasses everybody and access and equity and social justice policies and more recently our move to have a reconciliation with the Indigenous people and the Native Titles Act because I mean in Redfern I grew up with the Aborigines in Redfern because that was the area that they mostly frequented and that was because there was cheap housing that they occupied. You know Eveleigh Street – are you familiar with Redfern?

SR: Yes.

VK: Eveleigh Street where they are now, well that used to be empty houses and they used to be squatting and there used to be twenty people living in one house with no water, no electricity and nothing and so a group of

people – because I think the Aboriginal Movement also started from Redfern.

54.09 **SR: What can you remember about that?**

VK: I'm really very fortunate to be part of it. Well, what I remember about it is that the Aboriginal people were not served in hotels and shops.

SR: In shops as well?

VK: Shops. Our milk bar was the only milk bar in Redfern that served Aboriginal people and there was one hotel called the Empress Hotel which was just when you come from the city. I think the hotel is still there now but it's not function as a hotel, I think it's more of accommodation, and that was the only hotel that served Aboriginal people. And a lot of times they used to come to our shop and they used to say "Look, you have come here and you've got a shop now. We can't vote" because they didn't vote until 1967 - - -

SR: '6 or something like that, yes.

VK: - - - '67 when there was the Referendum. They said "We can't vote. Our children are taken away from us if the police wants it or the authorities wants it. We don't get child endowment and other things for our children" and we used to ask why, "Why is that?" "Because we're black people". And I think why the shop, why they were welcome there was because when my uncle first bought the shop during war it was very tough there. Because he was a wog they used to pick fights with him all the time.

55.57 So one time three whites were beating one Aboriginal man outside his shop so my uncle help him, help the Aboriginal man, and he happened to have twelve brothers, the Aboriginal man, so they really befriended my uncle and so he served them and helped them and everything so the tradition was carried on and they knew that our shop will serve them. But also we made no distinction because they were black people. We saw them as people and that they had the same rights.

SR: How were Aboriginal kids treated at school?

VK: No, no.

SR: What?

VK: Well, I don't remember. I think the only thing about Aborigines was just some pictures of them being wild in the bush and so on.

SR: No, but Aboriginal kids from Redfern at school. Were there any in your classes?

VK: No, there were no Aboriginal children in the schools.

SR: But you went to school in Glebe, didn't you?

VK: Yes. But also there were no Aboriginal kids in the school back in 1970, '72. When the Scott Report was done – there was a survey done about the Aboriginal people – there were a number of children but none of them attended the schools.

SR: This is in Redfern?

VK: None of them at school and none of them at university. Universities, well Pat O'Shane was the first one, I think, first Aboriginal to graduate and then Paul Coe - Paul Coe used to be at Aboriginal Legal Centre - and then it's only very recently that some of the Aboriginals go to university.

SR: But there must have been some of the kids in primary school and what have you in the area?

VK: No, there were none, and that's what the Scott Survey said: "Where are the Aboriginal children in the school system?"

58.01 **SR: Right. Were there kids in the area, were there Aboriginal - - -**

VK: Oh yes, oh yes, there were Aboriginal kids in the area but they didn't go to school.

SR: And nobody cared?

VK: Well, that's why a lot of times they were taken away by the welfare authorities. They were taken away from the parents because as I told you they used to squat in those houses and they were really terrible conditions. I mean I remember because my first job was as an Aboriginal welfare worker in 1973 because I couldn't find a job after I graduated from university with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and a Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology and when I was trying to find jobs the comments I was getting was that I had an accent, secondly that I was a woman and thirdly of my Greek culture so it's really hard.

SR: This is tape 2 of the interview with Vivi Germanos Koutsounadis, 13th of June 1995. Vivi, we were talking about the Aboriginal community in Redfern.

VK: Yes. Well, the Aboriginals were really disadvantaged. I mean there were disadvantaged migrant people as well but the Aboriginals were really down the bottom of the pile and they were living in appalling conditions and they were really discriminated, blatantly discriminated. They wouldn't find any jobs or nobody will employ them. When they were trying to find housing they wouldn't rent them the houses and also the police was harassing them and picking them up as they were drunk, more so than white people. So they used to come to our shop and they used to say that they had no rights and everything.

60.07 So when I found the job in 1972 it was as an Aboriginal welfare officer at South Sydney Community Aid which is still in Redfern. And I think at the time too there was the Aboriginal Movement, like Richard Blair [?] and Bob Blair [possibly Bob *Belleair*] and Phillip and Dick Blair and Mum Shirl and Naomi Mayers at the Medical Service and people like Robert Tickner who is now the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs used to work at the Legal Aid Service. They set up the Legal Aid Service, Aboriginal Legal Aid Service and Andrew Refshauge who is now the Deputy Premier used to be at the Medical Service. So the Medical Service and the Aboriginal Service were founded at the time and I think it came from the civil rights movement from America, it did have some effect, and the Aboriginal people, some of those people began to organise. And I would say that South Sydney Community Aid played a major part in that because I remember we used to have people from the Aboriginal community to come and train as welfare workers so that they can get the jobs because they didn't have any trained people. They started the Black Theatre with Lester Bostock who I know very well and Bob Maza in Botany Street down there and so they started to encourage the young Aboriginal kids to get out of the streets and provide something so that they can revive the culture because I think it was really important for them, for their survival, they had to revive the culture.

62.22 And I think also that the migrant people and Aboriginal people worked together; that was the beauty of the thing. I remember we used to hold functions and the Aboriginal people would be in and also when Al Grassby became the Commissioner for Community Relations and the Fraser government wanted to abolish the position I remember that the Aboriginal people – so I think we worked together for human rights because it was a common problem for all the people. But I think also too the Whitlam government really had a change in Australia's history. No matter what people say about Whitlam and the Whitlam government, I think it was the first time in Australian history that people had an opportunity to express about everything.

SR: The Whitlam government made a big change.

VK: Yes. I think for the first time there were inquiries and royal commissions on human relations and administration on all aspects of government and society and a simple person from the street had a chance to go and say what was wrong. And I remember I went before a lot of them because there were not many people at the time in the welfare field, in the migrant welfare field, so I felt like an obligation to do that.

64.00 And I think also too because we had a Liberal government for twenty three years some of the institutions had become so anachronistic that we needed some sort of a change and I think the Whitlam government brought that up. And I think a person that was really instrumental in relation to immigration was Al Grassby and I have a great admiration for him and an inspiration, he was really an inspiration too. And I worked with him the time he was minister but also when he was Commissioner for Community Relations and he did a marvellous job in relation to bringing forth multiculturalism in relation to putting together the access and equity policies that we have now so that we can have a much more tolerant society and live in unity and diversity, you know, being so diverse.

SR: O.K. Sorry, I want to drag you back to your childhood.

VK: Yes.

SR: I'm sorry. I just wanted to ask questions. You know your family, just looking at your family life when we're talking, say, the late '50s who controlled the finances in your family?

VK: My mother.

SR: Yes?

VK: Yes. Well, my mother was the economist of the family - - -

SR: Right.

VK: - - - because in the Greek household the woman is the economist and in our household my mother was the one that controlled the money and I think she did a marvellous job. Even when we started work I used to give all my money to my mother and I had money whenever I wanted to have money and it was sort of a whole family thing and not everybody having their own monies and so on and so forth.

66.15 And I think that's important because it helps to have the pooling of the money and if we bought a property or something it went in all the five

names, the children as well as my parents. So, yes, my mother did an excellent job with that. In the Greek household it seems that the husband is the head of the family but it's really the wife that has most of the power because she is controlling the money.

SR: Right.

VK: But in the eyes of the community it must be seen that she's not the head and it's the husband; but she has all the power in the household because she makes a lot of decisions in relation to how money's spent and so on but with my mother and father they both made the decisions. As I said before, they were really very progressive in their ideas and they lived together for fifty four years and I really admire their life together. They talked and they communicated with each other and they made decisions together and I don't remember they had any fights or anything.

SR: If your parents were going to make a big decision like say to invest in property, who would make the decision of what property to purchase and to go ahead and work all that out? Who would do that, your mother or your father?

67.57 VK: Well, they both would, they both would but I think, yes, my mother respected my father's viewpoint and my father respected my mother's. I think that was very important so, yes, they will make the decisions together.

SR: Jointly?

VK: Yes. But, you see, because my father was a merchant seaman and left my mother by herself for a long time she was used to making the decisions because she was by herself so she had to make the decisions so most often she had a lot of influence in the decision-making.

SR: Were your parents religious?

VK: Well, yes, I would say so. With the Greek Orthodox religion we have the icons and we go to the church, not regularly because of the shop but Eastertime and Christmastime and the saints' nine days, like Saint George because in Greece each family had a patron saint and for my father's side it's Saint George and for my mother's side it's my namesake, Paraskevi. So on those occasions and on the 15th of August, which is the assumption of the Virgin Mary, which is really very important we will go to the church and we'll fast and take Holy Communion and so on. So religion, yes, religion was important but I think the religion was more of having faith in human beings, right, in

people so it was more of a practical aspect of it because I remember when I was working as a welfare worker and I had families who really had a need as soon as I told my parents they will bake goods as well as money so they can help because they felt that that was you practice your religion and just don't go to the church. So, yes, in that regard they were.

70.29 **SR: Were they politically involved, your parents? Were they involved in any political organisations?**

VK: Well, they were Labor supporters. Yes, they really liked Mr Whitlam, the Whitlam government.

SR: But what about in the '50s? What can you remember from the '50s and '60s?

VK: From the '50s they were very much against Menzies.

SR: The '50s and '60s when you were a young child – I mean you were about ten - - -

VK: Political situation?

SR: Yes. Were they involved when they first - - -

VK: Well, you see, it's very difficult when you're new in the country to become involved in the politics because you don't understand. At the time there was only radio so it was difficult to understand radio so most of the politics were what was happening in Greece, really. And at the time here there were not many newspapers, there was only an odd newspaper, so most of the political things were what was happening in Greece and some of the local affairs and Greeks are really avid politicians, they really love politics. So I think that they were anti-Menzies, my parents, and also they complained about taxes and so on and so forth.

71.58 And they became involved afterwards when we became involved, I suppose, because I joined the Labor Party I joined the Labor Party and so my parents followed politics because we introduced them to it and at one stage they became members of the branches as well. But, of course, again the Labor Party's another story that reflected the times and was dominated by Anglo people and mainly older people and so you really didn't have a chance in the world of being elected to any position although later because I became very vocal, I became very much involved in ethnic affairs and community affairs and politics and so on then I did get some positions like member of the FEC [Federal Electoral Council] or SEC [State Electoral Council] or like that. But my

parents, yes, they were very interested in what was happening but the news that they got which was from the Greek newspaper which was stale news anyway. So that was the problem because there were no Greek radio programs at the time so they couldn't understand the radio. It was bad enough not knowing but the radio.

SR: So that was when you came into adulthood, really, that they got involved?

VK: Yes, that's right.

SR: In your home when you were growing up, what sort of discipline was used? What happened if you were naughty – I mean were you ever naughty?

VK: Discipline. Well, we used to get a smacking from spanks if we were misbehaving but also I remembered my mother used to make us write pages and pages of Greek or mathematics or also to do some housework, you know, clean and polish the floor or that but I think corporal punishment was the discipline that they knew so, yes, sometimes we used to get quite a good spanking.

74.35 **SR: In your family, what would you do typically in the evening in your home? In the evening what would your family do, I mean if the shop was open?**

VK: Well, we used to have a table right up the end of the shop, near the end, and we used to serve the food to eat and because we went to school and my parents were in the shop all day they had to wait until we were all home before we ate because that was the only time of the day that we all got together so that we can talk so it was really important; even if it was ten o'clock they would sit down. And I remember by the time you ate your food we had to get up about fifty times to serve the customers and then go back again and eat a little bit again and so on. But that time was a really important time for all of us to get together and to discuss issues because that was the only that we could get together. And also I remembered my father used to go and have a rest and my mother used to stay in the shop so I had to stay and study at that bottom table with all of the noise and I had to teach myself to concentrate on the study and not to hear the milkshake shakers and the coffee machine and the cars coming up and down the shop and my brothers used to study upstairs. Yes, we never really had a private life, family life, because everything had to revolve around the shop because we couldn't close the shop.

76.28 **SR: But you would have had a good social life, wouldn't you, with people coming to visit you there?**

VK: Yes. Well, if people came to visit we had a room behind the shop and they used to sit there or go upstairs in the house in one of the bedrooms because we didn't have a lounge room or anything. There were three bedrooms, a little kitchen and a bath and the toilet was downstairs. So we had to go all the way down the steps and go outside - because you know how the toilets were outside - outside into the backyard to go to the toilet and also the laundry was there as well. And so when people used to visit we either closed the shop a little bit earlier or they went behind. And we had a lot of people coming to our place - I never remember our shop or our house not having people - because we had a lot of people from Chios, from our island, and they were seamen so they used to jump ship when they arrived here. So because we were known they used to come there and so we were trying to find them, if they had any relatives, to send them to the relatives or find them some houses or some places where they could go and also because my uncle had the shop for many years if somebody wanted to find anything about a Greek person they would come to the shop so we had people all the time.

78.04 I remember one Christmas we had about twenty one people and my mother had to cook for everybody so that we can eat. And they were mainly not people that we knew but they were helping them because also Christmastime there were a lot of men who were by themselves and they were very lonely so my mother was saying "The poor so and so. What about if we invite them?" so they can all come and they as part of a family because they really didn't have the family. So I remember forever and ever we used to - sometimes we also used to keep people to sleep at our place because they didn't have anywhere to go so they used to sleep with my brothers. And we also had my cousin who she used to work in the shop so I and her were living in one room, my mother and father in another and my two brothers in another and if we had any visitors they will stay with my brothers if they were men and they will come into our room if they were girls because, you see, people just didn't have anywhere to go and my parents felt that it was important to help them.

SR: And you have been - well, I assume - you would have been expected to help in the shop.

VK: Yes.

SR: From what you've said you would have worked from when you were able. Would you have served in the shop from when you were young?

VK: That's right. Well, I remember because the bar was very high, it was one of those old fashioned bars, my mother and father used to put boxes so that we can step on them to get the flavour in the milkshakes, you know, the old fashioned milkshakes, to get the flavour and the milk and the ice cream from those very deep things and put them on the mixer and serve the customers.

80.09 So we used to help a lot and clean up and wash glasses – must have washed millions and millions of glasses in the time that we were there. But it was good experience because we really appreciated what my mother and father was going through and also it made us appreciate how money was earned and to be more persevering and motivated to do well and to do better so that we can get on in life.

SR: Were your parents happy?

VK: Yes, because they had their family together. I think Greek people really value family life and because they had their family together was one. But I remembered my mother used to cry often because she was missing her family but also because she couldn't communicate and she was feeling very frustrated and I remember because she couldn't read the numbers she used to get the wrong trams and she used to end up, oh, all over the place and she would telephone, telling us where she was so that we could either go and pick her up or get a taxi or she walked. Quite often she walked, a lot of times she walked from Glebe to Redfern so that she can save money, you know, to take food to my father and to my uncle who were working there. But I think once we grew up and we became educated I think they felt that they had fulfilled their mission and all the hardship that they had was worth their while because the three of us finished university and then we found good jobs.

82.12 And then we had good names in the community and so to them that was the satisfaction and the joy. But I remembered my mother was crying a lot of times because she was missing - and also because when we had fights she was really terrified and she couldn't express herself and she was feeling really frustrated and crying. And my father didn't say very much because, well, it was the men are supposed to be strong and not to complain so although he was unhappy he really didn't say anything but also my mother wouldn't say very much to him so that they would not upset each other but because I was the girl, I suppose, I

was closer to my mother and, yes, she used to confide in me a lot of times.

SR: Did you have friends outside the family? Like who were your friends?

VK: Not many. I think because we had the shop there wasn't much time to go out and have friends.

SR: Were there a lot of kids in the neighbourhood?

VK: Oh, yes, there were a lot of kids in the neighbourhood but I don't think we really mixed with the kids in the neighbourhood.

SR: Was that because of you being Greek?

VK: Because we had the shop but because also my parents were very protective and also the area was rough at the time; I mean there were some rough characters around.

84.10 **SR: Were there people that you had to avoid?**

VK: Yes. Well, I mean I never had any problems in going out. I think a lot of people come from outside and they say "Oh, what a terrible place. Aren't you afraid you might be raped?" or whatever but Redfern was an interesting place and also I think people were friendly and I think my parents were afraid to let us go out because they felt that we have bad influence from some of the other kids and also because they couldn't speak the language it was difficult to bring friends who were not Greek. So we had some Greek kids who were friends but not very many Australian kids and I remember my brothers went to Cleveland [Street] Boys' High School and they had some friends. They had more friends than I did because my parents had this traditional view about the girls being protected and they should remain in the house and not go out by themselves so I think that had a sort of effect. So I would say not too many friends but I had my cousins and the family and my mother and my aunts and so on.

SR: What sort of games did you play with your cousins and your friends?

86.03 VK: Well, games. I think my brothers liked football. I don't think we played many games. I think we listened to the radio, listened to the serials.

SR: What were your favourite serials?

VK: Well, *Captain Silver* was one and I remembered we used to go in front of – because we really didn't have much time to have spare time.

Because we were doing our homework or working in the shop we really didn't have very much time, spare time. I did do a lot of embroidery, some embroidery and knitting but games – and dancing. My parents, because they wanted us to keep the language and the Greek custom they used to have music so that we could dance.

SR: You were talking about doing embroidery but you also mentioned before that you liked the radio program called *Captain Silver*.

VK: *Captain Silver*, yes.

SR: Can you remember any other ones?

VK: Oh, dear.

SR: No, O.K. Did you read comics or books or anything like that?

VK: Oh, yes. I liked the movie magazines and I used to cut them out and paste them in the books and *Phantom* because my brothers used to read them, *Phantom* and Donald Ducks and all of those, Walt Disney. And I think there were some of the classics, illustrated classics. I think they were Greek but they were also in English as well and they used to be stories, the Ancient Greek mythology as well as *Treasure Island* and, you know, Robert Louis Stevenson and so on they used to be illustrated magazines.

88.20 And also in order to maintain my Greek I used to read the Greek magazines but they were the magazines that everybody didn't want so I collected them all and I maintained my Greek and that's how I speak very good Greek. Because there were no schools, there were no ethnic afternoon schools so I didn't attend one so that was the way for me to maintain my Greek.

SR: Before, you mentioned doing embroidery. Did your mother teach you that, the embroidery?

VK: Embroidery, yes.

SR: And other things, did she teach you other things?

VK: Well, embroidery and cooking - I mean she's a very good cook - well, all the things that a girl should be doing, sewing. My father bought me a sewing machine and I went and did lessons and I did some sewing. And other things like – that's it.

SR: I want to ask about the food. Was there a problem when you were here with sort of getting things like eggplant and capsicum and things like that? Were they commonly available, was that a

problem getting vegetables like eggplant and capsicum and things like that?

VK: No. We used to have those vegetables but then we were lucky because there was a Greek fruit shop just opposite the road and they used to – not in '54.

90.01 When we came in '54 the shops didn't display any of the products like they do now and we had so much difficulty trying to find things like rice or lentils or legumes because a lot of the Greek people had a lot of the legumes like chick peas and beans and all that. Eggs or cheese or feta cheese or all of those, olives, I mean there were very, very few shops that sold that. I remembered if we wanted something like a delicatessen, like continental, we had to go down to Bathurst Street where there used to be just one Greek shop which imported some of that stuff. And fruit shops, well, the fruit shops really didn't have all of those zucchinis and eggplants and okra and artichokes and all of those lovely vegetables and I think gradually some of the farmers, Italians – mainly Italians they started first, then some Greek – they gradually started growing those and some fruit shops, especially the Italian fruit shops or Greek fruit shops we have them. And we were lucky in Redfern because there was a Greek fruit shop opposite there - it's still there – and so he used to have a lot of that stuff. But then our father used to go to the markets, Paddy's Markets, and I remember I went with him a lot of times and so I think that Paddy's Markets sometimes because of the Chinese, you know, the Chinese farmers and some of those people at that time, you could find but not readily available so, yes, it was hard to try to find and it was like a delicacy if we did.

92.05 The other one is about fish and so on, I mean you only had certain types of fish. You didn't have octopus or calamari or squids and those types of fish food which is really a delicacy but here in Australia they didn't really. Although I remembered we went fishing with my father because my father was really an avid fisherman and so he had a boat and he used to take us with him and teach us how to do it. And we used to catch some squid and octopus, especially I remember Spit Bridge, around that area there used to be but then after a while they just fished them out and, yes, I really loved going fishing with him because it was very relaxing.

SR: Well, what other things would the family do for fun? I mean presumably your mum would be home minding the shop if you did that.

VK: Yes.

SR: Did the family

VK: Well, we would go fishing. My father would go fishing practically every weekend with his friends and we had fresh fish, which was really great. Other things is we would go to the beach. It was very popular going to the beach and having a swim and having a picnic or having a picnic with some of our friends or other families.

SR: What would happen to your shop at that time?

VK: Well, either my mother or my father with one of us will stay in the shop and then the rest will go out. Or go to the movies, the Greek movies, and Greek movies back then were very rare and the only one used to be the Odeon down in Oxford Street – you know Oxford Street Paddington – that was the Greek movie and you had to wait for hours to get in because every Greek in Sydney was congregating there.

94.07

And then a Greek man bought the Lawson Theatre and he turned it into Greek movies as well and then Enmore so there were more Greek films. And, of course, when the videos came in they bought these. And sometimes when some singer or some performers came from Greece we would try to get tickets and go because it was really important that it was something from Greece and also religious ceremonies and national days. When there was Greek National Day or something we will go and participate but also during holidays we will go to the park. We went to the park very often and played in the playground and I remember we used to go down to Hyde Park quite often and go to the museum and see some of the things that were happening there and some parades sometimes.

SR: And one of your parents would always go with you?

VK: Yes. They went with us or my uncles and aunts we went with them.

SR: So you went out quite a lot?

VK: Not very often. I think because we were trying to save money they didn't want to spend too much so we really didn't go very much but we went. Or if there was a good film down in the city in the movies and we wanted to go my mother would come, mainly my mother - my father wasn't really very interested in films – and we would go and see the movie because they thought that since we were restricted it was important for them to take us out.

SR: I wanted to ask you can you remember any local characters?

96.02 VK: Yes. I think there was a very famous boxer - it was an Aboriginal boxer. What was his name?

SR: Lionel Rose?

VK: Yes, Lionel Rose but there was another person, Aboriginal fella that was. And also my brothers were followers of the Rabbits [Rabbitohs], South Sydney Leagues, and so the players were their heroes anyway, most of the players at the time. Who else?

SR: Can you remember any eccentrics, people who were a bit funny? You know what I mean, really colourful local people. Some people before in previous generations talk about Bea Miles and other people who were really almost, well, very famous. Were there any people like that around Redfern that you can remember?

VK: Well, I know Mum Shirl because she used to be involved with the kids and the families and also the alcoholic things, St Vincent's Presbytery with Father Kennedy. He was one that did a lot of work in the area, Father Kennedy. Also who was the mayor, one of the mayors - who was the mayor? - and we used to invite him to the Greek dances, the mayors.

SR: Mayor of Sydney. Do you mean Nick Shehadie?

VK: Not Shehadie, no. Was Shehadie in Redfern? No.

SR: Yes, he grew up in Redfern.

VK: That's right, yes, he was, he was the mayor. And also the other person that I remembered was Reg Cope - he was a Member of Parliament - yes, he was around. And who else?

SR: What do you remember him for? They're famous but did you actually know any of them?

VK: Yes. Well, Reg Cope, yes, because he was in the branch, the ALP branch that I went to. And, of course, Margaret Barry more recently because we worked together with Margaret and also - what's his name now, the Minister for Industrial Relations, what's his name? He's in federal parliament - Laurie Brereton. Well, he's famous. He used to come to the festivals at South Sydney. And also some of the people from the Uniting Church they were around at the time and we worked together like - what was his name - with his wife. I forgot their names.

SR: Well, one of the other things that I wanted to ask you is you've mentioned about the Greek community celebrating religious festivals or national days, can you remember any other rituals? I

mean there was Cracker Night, Empire Day, but can you remember any occasions where at school maybe there were mass displays where everybody did something, either some sort of dancing, maypole dancing or anything?

100.12 VK: Oh, yes, we did that with the schools.

SR: What was that?

VK: And we used to go to Hyde Park and Redfern Park when we had the school carnivals and also the Showground I remember once we went.

SR: What did you do, what was it, what sort of display?

VK: Well, yes, holding that thing with the – what is it called?

SR: The ribbon, maypole.

VK: Maypole, yes, that's right, and going around.

SR: Did you sing songs while you did it?

VK: And sing songs, yes. And I think also I remembered when – was it the Queen Mother that came? I mean when the Queen Mother came I remembered I was put on the very front spot because my teacher said "You must see the Queen Mother and wave to her" so I was put right up at the front to wave to the Queen Mother, I remembered that. But I think there were not very many mass festival celebrations. There were the footballs, the footballs and so on, but we started something up in South Sydney, the South Sydney Festival. Well, how that started was very interesting because I was working for South Sydney Community Aid at the time. Yes, there wasn't much of mass – although there were but we didn't attend it because it really didn't mean very much except if there was a big parade or something we participated.

102.05 **SR: At school was there much flag raising and singing of the anthem and that kind of business? Did you do it every morning, like sing God Save the Queen or anything like that?**

VK: No.

SR: Did you say prayers in the morning?

VK: Oh, yes, that's right. Well, yes, when we woke up and before we went to bed.

SR: But I'm wondering at school. Did you go to a state school?

VK: Yes, that's right, I did go. Yes, I remembered we had to say a prayer and also we had to have the milk. I mean that was whether you like it or not and I used to get into trouble if we were fasting during Eastertime to get Holy Communion and the teacher will punish me because I didn't want to drink my milk. And I used to say to her "But we're fasting and my mother told me not to drink milk and not to eat any meat or anything". "But you have to drink it". "But I can't drink it because my mother told me not to drink it because we have to go to church". So I used to get into trouble with that because - I don't know, I think the Catholics fasted but I don't think they fast for a week though, you know, not to eat meat or fish for a week. We don't have to [not] eat for a week and we eat fruit and olive oil and all that but nothing which have any more products so we used to get into trouble all the time. And also some of the food that my mother gave me from home was very strange and the kids used to make fun and go "Yuck". Red eggs, one time I took - for Easter we coloured the eggs and so my mother had some left over and I took some to school and as soon as I opened my lunch to get them the girls went "Yuck. Red eggs" and I thought "Oh, dear, what's happening? There's something wrong here".

104.06 So I packed it away and I told my mother "No more red eggs, mum. I won't take any more eggs to school" because they didn't understand. And I tried to explain and said "Look, it's just an egg". "Oh, red egg, yuck, red egg" but being children you have that.

SR: The other thing I wanted to ask you, did you get any sex education?

VK: No.

SR: Either at home or at school?

VK: No.

SR: None?

VK: No because, you see, sex is taboo.

SR: So what happened when you started to menstruate?

VK: Well, my mother told me how to put a towel and everything and that was it.

SR: Didn't tell you what it was about?

VK: No. So I mean at the time not just the Greek girls, I think generally sex education was taboo but for the Greek family it was even more so.

You're not supposed to know so eventually you learned from other sources in an indirect way.

SR: Can you remember any deaths?

VK: Deaths. Not in our family.

SR: And common illnesses in that time, late '50s?

VK: Well, common illnesses, you know, colds and so on and the house remedies because again at the time there were not Greek doctors and so when you went to the doctor sometimes you couldn't communicate and I remembered I had tonsils when I was twelve years old and I used to get blood poisoning and because we didn't have anybody to go with us to the hospital – we used to go to the hospital but there was no interpreters or anyone.

106.18 So for a whole year until we got this woman who spoke Greek and English well and came to the doctor and the doctor was trying to tell my mother for me to have an operation but she didn't understand. So this lady came and told my mother so I went in and had an operation and the person who operated on me was a student, student doctor, so she must have cut very deep because a few days later when I was home I began bleeding and I had to go back to the hospital and they were waiting for the doctor who operated on me to come. And I'll never forget this but she came and she put some swabs right down my throat to stop the bleeding - I'll never forget that - I nearly choked and that was it. And also the operation where they used to put the chloroform with the cotton wool, God, I'll never forget that either, you know, the whole thing coming and I was feeling that I was choking. And the smell, I'll never forget the smell. But, yes, with deaths I think not in our family at that time but I used to have sort of like a Sunday school of some Greek children and one of the little boys was run over by a truck while crossing the road. So because his parents were in no state to go and identify him I had to go and identify him.

108.15 **SR: How old were you?**

VK: I was about eighteen; I was much older. But, yes, it was terrible because it crush his head. So, yes, that's the only death that I remember. And my uncle when he was killed by the bus but I was much older with that and we had to take him to the funeral parlour and instruct them of how to treat the body because you have to treat the body in a special way and the funeral parlour people didn't have a clue.

SR: About embalming?

VK: No. What they do is they wash the body first with wine like what they did to Christ and then they put a white piece of cloth and then dress them, dress them up, tie their hands up and put a cross made out of wax, beeswax, on the mouth and the priest has to say special prayers before they bury them. And also the family keeps vigil until the body is actually buried and they receive friends and relatives when they pay their respects. So, yes, I really had to write it up and distribute it to the funeral parlour because they didn't know. It's very important.

110.04 So I did a lot of unpleasant tasks as a child because I had to go and interpret, as an interpreter with hospitals, with courts, with doctors, with different places because there were no interpreters. Only in 1973 Al Grassby in the Labor government got the telephone interpreting service and also the Department of Immigration they appointed bilingual education officers.

SR: One thing I just want to say because we're sort of running a bit short on time on this and it's a bit out of childhood but you said there was an interesting story about the start of the South Sydney Festival. Can you quickly tell us how the South Sydney Festival started, what that came out of?

VK: Well, I was working at South Sydney Community Aid and we said "Well, what about if we all celebrate all together as part of good community relations?" and so they said "Oh, well, we're going to the big hall, the town hall, and do some dancing" and I said "But festivals don't happen in town halls". And they said "Where?" "In the street". "Oh, you can't do that". I said "Why not?" Said "Oh, well, we'll have to close the street and we have to get police permission and from the Roads [department] and everything and you can't have a festival in the street". I said "In Greece, in all other place the festivals are out in the street". So anyway they said "Oh, well, all right, we'll try it". So I said "O.K. Let's try the police first" so we tried the police and we said "Look, we want to have a festival on that day and can we close the street?"

112.00 They said "Well, you can close half of the street but not all the street". Anyway, you know where Wynn's used to be where now it's Social Security, so we set up the stage there and of course so many people came the police eventually had to close the street so we closed Regent Street and it was the first time ever that anything like that had happened.

SR: Was that in the '70s?

VK: Of course, yes. And we had Greek dancing and Aboriginal dancing and music and everything and the police were there, controlling the

traffic because we closed the street and since then the festival in South Sydney is happening. And it was a very good event because it brought together all the people in the community and that's how we fostered the community spirit and also for people to learn about each other, the Australian people learn about the Greeks, the Aboriginal people also performing and being part of the whole community. And that was a thing what was unique about Redfern, the fact that we worked together and I think we pioneered a lot of things because eventually that became the Carnivale. The Carnivale idea for the Ethnic Affairs Commission, that took up and it was part of an event during the year and also we initiated 2EA Radio, ethnic radio. I remember Al Grassby was recording his welcome in eight languages in South Sydney Community Aid in St Luke's Church. You know St Luke's Church?

SR: Yes.

VK: And because it was so noisy we had to have the recoding in the confession room at South Sydney and we used to put cloths and everything so that we can mask the noise, you know, it won't come out. Yes, and he and another three of us were the sort of organising committee and also trying to launch SBS Television by doing videos and had this idea of having a moveable studio so that you can get reception all over the place.

114.24 **SR: Can I just take you back a little bit? You know in the '50s and the '60s, where did most other people work? Before, you mentioned industry there.**

VK: Yes.

SR: The people who lived in Redfern, who were they?

VK: Where they work?

SR: Yes.

VK: Well, they worked in the factories. There were a lot of electrical, leather, clothes, the clothes mills, process work, packing and tinned food and everything, and there was also the light industry, steel and so on and also a lot of the places where they make machinery and so on. And also the car [industry] at Zetland, the General Motors Holden, Zetland. Yes, Zetland is near Botany. It used to be a huge place; a lot of migrants worked there. Crown Glass, that was a very famous place; practically everybody went through there. You know Crown Glass in Darlinghurst? Well, a lot of women and men used to work in there, migrant people, and most of the factories there. They were mainly unskilled people.

SR: O.K. Look, what I think we might do - I'd like to finish up now - - -

116.01 VK: Yes.

SR: - - - and I think that we might come back because there are lot of things that you touched on and I had to cut you off and I'm sorry. You kept going out of childhood but it was fascinating what you had to say and I think we should pick up on some of them and also there are other things from your childhood era that I just didn't get to. But thank you very much and we should develop this further, I think.

VK: That's all right.

SR: That's terrific.

VK: Yes. I hope you will see the viewpoint from the migrant viewpoint and it's a good idea that the project is being done.

SR: Thank you.

VK: Thank you too.

Interview ends