
Community voices – transcript – OH 299/7

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Interviewer: Philip Satchell

Radio 5AN: Radio programs about South Australian families

Extract of an Oral History of the founder of Stanley's Fish Café where he recounts his experiences in the 1930s as a Greek migrant who could not speak English and his efforts to gain employment.

What was it like being a young - - - And I take it you didn't speak much English then?

Not at all, not at all. I've never been to an English school at all.

So you came out and you couldn't speak English?

Not a word. Because I left here when I was about two years old I think.

In the '30s, and we weren't a very multi-cultural society then. We weren't very used to Greeks.

Well actually no. No, it was the other way around I think - it was the other way around. You had no choice. I remember when I was working - - -. From there I went to another carpenter work in a place called [Einasleigh?] and there was a school there with about, oh I would say, forty-odd students from the farms. This was a very small town. It had an extra store, otherwise a bakery and a hotel and that's about all. My boss there approached the schoolmaster whether he would take a student. "Oh no, no way we'll do that." When my boss persevere with it, "Oh," he said, "well he's over the age. He's over fourteen". It was pretty hard to be accepted at the time.

I bet it was. It's funny isn't it, I remember from my own childhood that in a country town in New South Wales and Queensland, all the cafes were run by Greeks.

Absolutely.

And in fact my family would say - well I can remember my aunty saying - "Oh, we'll go down to the Greeks for tea tonight", you know. And it was the Ozone or the Niagara.

That's right, yes. They were good value

That's right. And you went in to a sandwich bar.

Well it was very hard to get another job anywhere. You just were not looked on, you know. Of course you must remember that there was no industry in those days where you can be taken on, you know, and you had to be taken on at minimum of wages too as well, and long hours. You know, six to ten, eleven o'clock at night was very common. I worked those hours from six to eleven, six to twelve, since I was fourteen years old. I got used to that I went on working with it and I reckon that's one of my secrets of success, because I wasn't afraid to work.

Just put in the hours.

Put in the hours.