

Moving for a 'better life'

BY ANNIE LEWIS

AFTER the devastation of World War II and during the civil war in Greece that followed, more than 160,000 Greeks came to Australia in search of a new life.

Archived copies of *The Daily Advertiser* provide a snapshot of the year Michael Georgiou arrived in the Riverina.

"The Minister for Immigration (Mr Holt) said: The immigration policy of the present government lays greater emphasis on the introduction of British migrants than has been the case hitherto. In pursuance of this policy, it has decided to increase the number of British migrants to be introduced in 1950, and make a commensurate reduction in the intake of displaced persons." - *The Daily Advertiser*, March 17, 1950.

"During a 12-hour high danger period more than 1300 buildings were inundated and swollen flood waters surged eight feet deep through parts of the city. It was estimated that almost half the city had been inundated when the river yesterday rose to a 33 feet level." - *The Daily Advertiser*, March 25, 1950.

Michael, 78, has a clear memory of when he learned he would be moving to Australia.

"Back in 1947 I was a seven-year-old boy living in the coastal fishing village of Cyprus when my father came back from the neighbouring port city and told us that he was coming to Australia," he said.

"Tears were rolling down my face as he lifted me up and sat me on his knees and said 'Son we are going to Australia for a better life.'"

"That was a special moment with my father Nicholas and it was the time I'll always treasure as there were many life lessons he passed onto me during sometimes

difficult times."

Michael said he had always been amused by the fact he was never taught to swim.

"We never learned, even though we lived by the sea," he said.

Michael said his first memory of arriving in Australia was seeing Melbourne Port.

"It was night time and I was so glad to see my father was there waiting for us to meet us," he said.

"I could not speak a word of English, neither myself my mother or my brother could speak a word of English," she said.

"Time went on though and we gradually learned to speak the language."

Michael said they came to the strangely named town called Wagga.

"When I began my school education at Gurwood Street Public School, for about four months I sat at the back of the classroom drawing on pieces of paper as in those



WEDDING BELLS: Michael and Dawn Georgiou celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 2015.

days there was no special help for migrant school children," he said.

"After school, I would work in a cafe and on the weekends for the grand sum of 10 shillings a week or about one dollar a week.

"While my schooling was a struggle, in some aspects I did have one advantage - the teaching of maths back in Cyprus seemed to be a little more advanced than the teaching so I always found

myself ahead of the class in maths, but I could not as quickly master the English language."

Michael said, for the most part, the community was welcoming.

"You get a few knocks, especially at school, but I learned to wear it and take part with the other children," he said.

"Even after high school level I would regularly lose five points on each subject in

spelling, but I still managed to come to the exams at the high school.

"I wanted to stay complete those years, to leave school to parents run the cafe Michael said they slow to learn and fit new Australian around them.

"We learned the language and the



A BETTER LIFE: Michael Georgiou said Wagga is home and he is very proud of the city it is. Michael was also as a presenter and treasurer for 2AAA and is a former councillor and deputy mayor.

Wagga began to accept us," he said.

"I believe that was through our hard work, friendliness and willingness to have a go," Michael said while they made Wagga their home, they never forget their roots.

"We continued to stay true to our own customs, language and faith practices to keep a little bit of home alive with this new land, but we embraced the new world around us with open arms."

he said.

"I am forever thankful of the new opportunities that are found in the safe, young, new country away from the ravages of war in old Europe we had to leave for our own safety."

Michael said one of the best days of his life was meeting his wife-to-be Dawn and opening their own business - Michael's Delicatessen. "My shop was a continental shop and I brought all the

imported stuff," he said.

"Gradually Australians became used to the food. We brought a lot of new food, no one knew about filo pastry and what would happen was, the big supermarkets would come to my shop and have a look at what I had so they could bring it.

Michael said, not long after opening the business he joined South Wagga Apex Club. "I endeavoured to give

back to the wonderful support we received as new migrants," he said.

"In later years, as my son Nicholas began his education, I became involved in the various school boards, clubs and scout groups."

Michael has made the long 10,000km journey back many times to see his country and relatives. "We have visited, but Wagga has long been considered our home," he said. "I have

many friends in Sydney and Melbourne and many times they ask 'Why do you stay in Wagga? Why not come to Sydney or Melbourne?' and all I say to them is why would we want to leave this place?"

"My family and my wife all came to Australia for a better life and we found it. We are very proud to be called Australians and citizens of this great city of Wagga."

Michael said he accepted the Australian way of life and



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Michael Georgiou

did not endeavour to bring any changes.

"I would like to remind everyone that this country was built by convicts, migrants and refugees from every corner of this earth," he said.

"From Europe and the Mediterranean, Asia and Middle East, Africa and elsewhere. Let us all count our blessings in being here and work together to carry this great country forward because we all came here for a better life and we found it."

Over the next six weeks, *The Daily Advertiser* will continue to share the stories of some of those who have moved to Australia, one from each decade. Some to escape war and devastation, and some for love.