

THE LIFE STORY OF TANAS KIREV



**By Tanas Kirev
(Athanasios (Tom) Kirou)**

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FORWARD

In November of 2016, with some persuasion from my son George, I decided to sit down and record a video of my life story. In this autobiography I speak solely in Macedonian. As it is something that I wish to pass down to future generations of my family it was decided that it may be best to transpose the contents of the video into written form but in English instead of Macedonian. Sadly, our mother tongue in time will disappear for most of us living in Australia. Even now, often I need to speak to my grandchildren in English. Whilst this autobiography was initially intended for my immediate family, I am happy to share it with others that may have a historical interest in the plight of our people.

I have included a couple of rough maps (not drawn to scale) that may help you visualise where the places that I refer to in my story are situated. The names stated are in Macedonian.

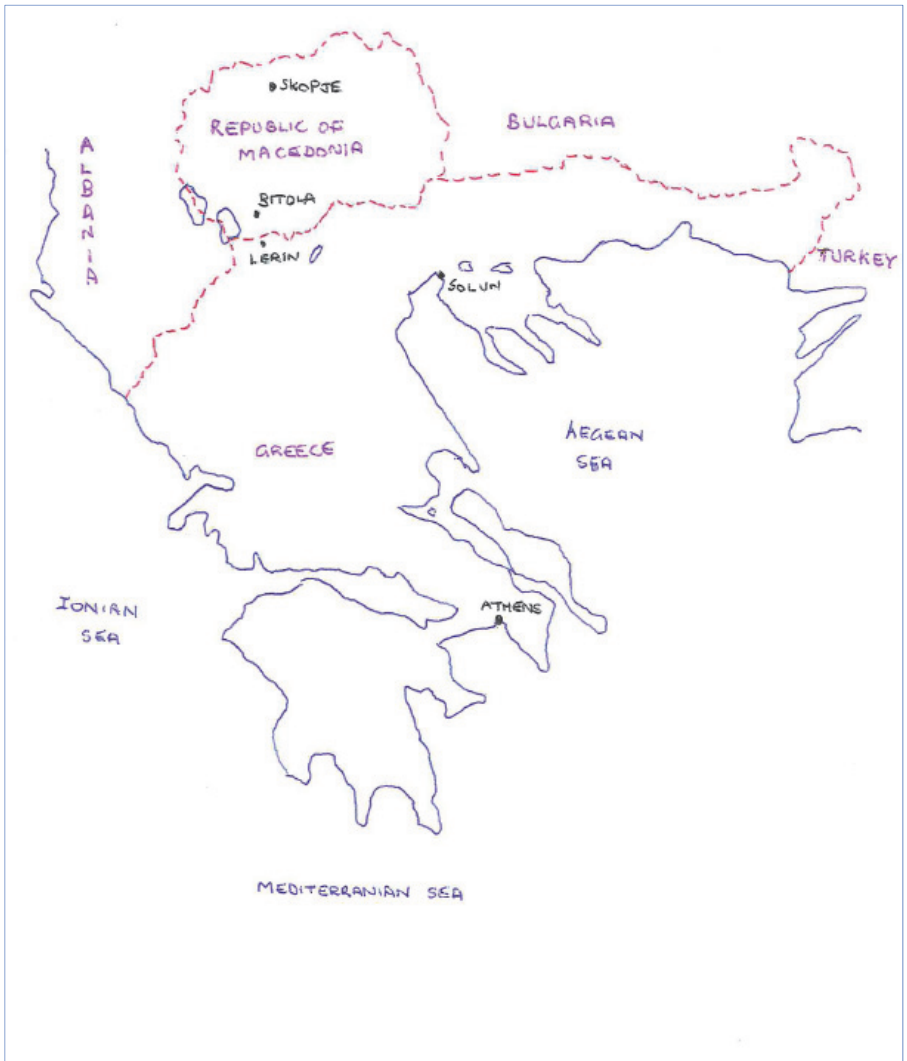
October 2021



These are two early photos of me taken in the village. In the top one I am standing outside Tsveti Luca (St Luca – a small monastery in Neret) circa 1950.

The bottom photo is circa 1953.







THE EARLY YEARS

My name is Tanas Kirev (Athanasios Kirou in Greek) and I was born on the 14th of September 1931 in the Lerinsko village of Neret (Greek name Polypotamos) in Aegean Macedonia. I am the eldest child of Macedonian parents Velo and Magda Kirev. My parents had five children – my other siblings in order of birth were Fania (deceased 2010), Ristana (dec 2020), Pando and the youngest, Kata. My father, Velo Kirev, was third eldest of four sons to Kote and Yanna Kirev. My father's other brothers in chronological age were Mitre (eldest), Risto and Petre.

My grandfather (dedo) Kote was a very respected, able and affluent member of the village. He constructed a water driven flour mill (vodenitsa) and owned numerous fertile fields (nivea) in which he sowed crops. Unfortunately, my grandmother died at an early age and he remarried a woman from Nesrum who had five children. My step grandmother had begged my grandfather to marry her saying that he was wealthy and that they could live a comfortable life together. He felt sorry for her and thought that it would be in the best interest for his four sons to have a mother figure present, so he decided to marry. As it turned out, his second wife looked out for her children and didn't give as much care and affection to dedo's children – often leaving them to go hungry.



My immediate family. The back row from left to right is my sister Fania, me and my sister Ristana. In the front row is my brother Pando and sister Kata with my parents Velo and Magda. Circa 1948.



My parents' wedding with Magda and Velo standing with my paternal grandparents Dedo Kote and Baba seated. Circa 1929.

In time, dedo struggled to feed, clothe and fend for nine children and in the mid 1930s went to Australia in order to earn enough money to feed such a large family. He wrote a letter to my father and his brothers where he referred them to his zlutni zupusteni pilinia (My golden neglected chicks). He regretted his decision to remarry in the older years of his life and heap onto himself the burden of having to look after another person's children. He was extremely upset that his family had fallen apart because of his decision to remarry. He died in 1942 in Melbourne having never returned to his homeland. Dedo was amongst some of the earliest Macedonians to emigrate to Australia.

My father Velo was a very thoughtful and considerate man. He was the type of person who could do whatever he put his mind to. He was a builder who had a hand in many of the best houses built in the village. He could also do blacksmith work, shoeing horses and making saddles and bridles for working animals as well as making wooden barrels. As a result of being multi skilled, he was able to bring in money from numerous sources.

Because my father Velo could see what his stepmother was doing, he had a falling out with his father. When my mother was pregnant with me, she had a craving and broke off a capsicum that was part of a platted bunch strung outside to dry under the porch of the home. She cooked the capsicum and ate it. As a result of this seemingly petty thing, an argument ensued. Due to this and other prior incidents, my father decided to move to his mother-in-law's house (dedo Stase Marin).

I was born in the Marin house. My hospital was the barn. I was born on straw strewn on the earthen ground of the barn. After a short time, we moved from the Marin house to the Mihaieleva house (my auntie Velika's house) since they were living in America and the house was vacant. We looked after the house, did repairs when required and best of all, we didn't have to pay rent. It was in this house where all my other siblings (Fania, Ristana, Pando and Kata) were born.

Dad's oldest brother Mitre also went to Australia. Whilst there, he obtained paperwork in the hope of bringing his two sons Vasil and Sotir and Striko (uncle) Risto (my father's other brother) to join him. Unfortunately, my step grandmother talked Vasil and Sotir into remaining in the village with her. As a result, my uncle Risto also decided to remain behind in the village. They wrote back to Striko Mitre to tell him of their decision to remain back in the village with baba. Striko Mitre was so disenchanted that he burned the permits.

From all accounts Striko Mitre was a bit of a comedian and prankster who worked during the depression living in campsites in and around the Western Australian towns of Manjimup, Bridgetown and Pemberton cutting sleepers for railway line construction. Sadly, his son Vasil was killed during the second world war, fighting as a partisan. He was killed when he stepped on a land mine placed in the hills above the village in a spot called the ornitsa.

Striko Mitre died a lonely man in Fremantle at around 1956, never having returned to his homeland. The sad part about this is that I arrived in Perth, Western Australia in 1955 and

could have met him if I had been told sooner of his whereabouts by my Vuijko Stojan (mum's older brother) who kept in contact with Striko Mitre from time to time but didn't bother to tell me.

During my early years and even before my time, our people endured very difficult times with the region ravaged by constant political unrest, wars, and poverty. When Greece gained control in 1913 of the Aegean part of Macedonia, our people were forced to Hellenise, and the Greek government ruled with a heavy hand. Everyone in our village, as was the case throughout the predominantly Macedonian villages in the region, was forced to speak Greek. Many did not know how to speak Greek and they were afraid to openly speak Macedonian for fear of being punished. There were even people who were assigned to sit outside homes to listen and ascertain as to what language was being spoken. These spies would then relay this information to the relevant Greek authorities. At night we always kept windows and blinds shut to avoid being detected. We endured much hardship during these times. My mother was forced to go to night school to learn Greek – leaving at home her young and hungry children crying. Even at school, students would do to other students if they heard them speaking Macedonian. Greek teachers would ask why you were speaking this filthy language and give you a beating.

DURING WAR TIMES (WW2)

In 1939 World War Two engulfed our region with Italy declaring war with Greece. My father, my uncles, and many other men from Neret were conscripted into the Greek army. They were taken to fight on the front line in Albania in a region we call Vreba. The Greek army was made up of many Macedonians who fought against the Italians. During winter quite a few of these fighters froze to death. Some of those who survived had limbs cut off due to frost bite. Many men returned to the village crippled and maimed. Some of the Macedonian fighters deserted (the Greeks called them lipotatsi) from Vreba and headed back to their villages because they feared death more from either starvation or the cold. When the men from Neret came back home, the Greek army rounded them up, took them back to Vreba, and shot them. The same thing happened to Macedonians from other villages who had deserted. During the war there were very few adult men left in the village and much of the hard labour fell to the women and older boys.

Shortly afterwards, in 1941, the Germans and the Bulgarians occupied the region. When the Germans arrived, people from the villages as well as the town's folk rushed to Lerin and started smashing shop windows, looting whatever they could get their hands on – including such things as olive oil, halva, rice, paprika etc. There was virtually nothing left in the shops to purchase. People had no money. The Germans upon arrival bought whatever food they could using fake money. They would give substantial amounts of this fake money to farmers for their crops and tell them to use this money to purchase

whatever they needed from other farmers. The problem was the German Army had purchased all the available crops from the farmers to the point that there was no wheat left over for future sowing of crops. Things were so desperate that people were coming in the snow, bare footed, from as far as Epirus (region to the south-west of Lerin) looking for food. They were crying and begging for a piece of bread. Things were extremely bad. I was young when this was happening, but our home faced the village square (stret-selo) and I could see who was coming into the village. I would quite often mingle with the older men from the village who would meet in the village square, taking a keen interest listening to what was being said. I would often sell homemade cigarettes that my father had put together to these older men to obtain food. They talked amongst themselves paying little notice to me because I would have been considered too young to worry about.

The people living in the villages managed to survive a bit easier than those living in the larger towns because they could still grow the odd thing to live off. People who were fortunate enough to have a few sheep and a cow managed best. Unfortunately, with war going on all around you, even if you planted crops, it was not safe to go out and tend to them as you were likely to be shot and killed being out in the open fields. In desperate times we would dig up the snow and eat the roots of certain grasses to survive. Some people also managed to secretly hide food in underground cellars hoping that others did not find out about it. Things were so desperate that you could quite easily have been killed for a small amount of food.

It got so desperate that barbers from Lerin would go out to the villages seeking work. They would stop people ploughing in the fields to ask if they would like a haircut in exchange for food. It got so bad that people would wear hessian bags cut up to make clothes. Some who were fortunate enough to own sheep were able to darn their own clothes. I had pants made from plastic by my father. They were stiff and made noise as you walked. They also made you bleed due to severe chafing.

Shoes were also scarce. Some people tried to make wooden ones whilst others used pig skins to make pinsi (moccasins) which were extremely slippery.

When the Bulgarians arrived in 1941, the villagers made an archway on the road close to the Krepeshina and Neret border. The archway was made from green foliage and vine leaves were also placed on the ground for the troops to walk on as they made their way into Neret. All the villagers welcomed them to the sounds of church bells ringing and rifles being shot into the air. Everyone was celebrating because the Bulgarians had arrived. Our people had endured much under the authoritative and oppressive Greek regime and had hoped that the Bulgarians would be more sympathetic to our plight for freedom.

The Bulgarians gathered everyone in the village square and their leaders Kalchov and Mladenov asked if there were any Bulgarians living in the village. Sotir Ianakov, who was the village mayor (cojbajia), said that he was. When the Bulgarian leaders asked Sotir where in Bulgaria he was born he couldn't

answer them and instead told them the truth that he in fact was born in this village.

Kalchov said “You are not Bulgarian. You are Macedonian and you should call yourself Macedonian because there will come a time when the Greeks will come back and they will put you in jail because you will be considered a Bulgarian sympathiser. You will continue to suffer and you will die in jail. Call yourselves what you are – don’t lose your identity.”

They then asked “Are there any Greeks in the village?” Panayoti Vulgarakis said that he was and would die Greek because his father was from Crete and his mother Menka Popova (her father was a priest) is a Greek teacher. Kalchov shook his hand and said you are a true patriot and state correctly what you are but there are others here who are denouncing their ethnicity and they shouldn’t.

The Bulgarian army came through the village on several occasions together with the Germans and on one occasion were trying to establish whether there were any people colluding with the partisans. On this day they once again gathered everyone in the village square. A Bulgarian officer had a piece of paper with the names of people they suspected were working with the partisans and wanted to round up and shoot these people. Lazo Tsitsulov was on this wanted list. He was known to the Bulgarians and they told Lazo to get going otherwise he would be shot by the Germans as he was on their list. He asked the Bulgarian soldiers who were helping him what to do to escape. They told him to get an egg basket and pretend to collect eggs to feed the Bulgarian soldiers and

use this opportunity to get away. Lazo raced home to collect his rifle and say goodbye to his wife. Lazo escaped but the German soldiers arrived at his house soon after. His wife was interrogated and because of the shock and trauma died soon after.

On another occasion when the Germans had first occupied the village, the Greek army had entered the Neretska planina (Neret Mountains) in a region called the Ornitsa. The Greeks fired artillery from the Plotcha (a rock outcrop overlooking the village). There were two recently engaged girls who were standing outside one of the houses and they were killed from the bombing. My father Velo and another Neret resident, Vasil Dimirov, were part of the Greek brigade that day. My father was very upset at what had happened and insisted that if the bombing of the village did not stop, he would turn his gun onto the soldiers who were bombing and killing innocent people. Luckily no further bombing of the village took place that day. Soon after that incident Greece had surrendered to Germany and dad came home from doing national service. Vasil Dimirov would go on to assist the partisans. On one fateful day Vasil was asked by the partisans to go to Lerin to obtain food supplies, but someone had informed the Germans. Vasil was caught and hung using fencing wire.

To provide for our family, dad would cut timber in exchange for food. He would quite often gather a few other men from the village to go with him. On one occasion when my father was coming back from the valley with my uncle Spiro Marin, they ran into a German blockade just outside Lerin. The partisans had killed two German soldiers in Klubachista which

is a town on the way from Lerin to Bitola. At this roadblock, as retribution, the Germans were hanging people as they arrived. They strung up a rope between two trees and put a rope around the neck of each person, stood them up on a stool and then took the stool away from under them. They had already hung 17 people, one of whom was the priest from Nevoleni. My father and uncle were in line ready to be hung as well, when suddenly the Gestapo arrived from Lerin. They were hoping to get there in time because one of their informants (who was a schoolteacher from Lerin) was also in line but they didn't get there in time to save him. As a result of having accidentally murdered one of their own, they decided to let all the others go. Luckily, my father and uncle escaped from being executed. They were still in shock when they got back to the village and tried to explain what they had witnessed.

A great number of Germans were killed in the Lerinsko region. On one occasion there were German troops getting ready to board a train in Lerin when the English planes arrived and bombed them. Also, when the Germans retreated, the Yugoslav partisans inflicted a lot of casualties as well.

People lived in total fear. You could not go out and tend to your crops or animals (if you had any). You had to be careful who you spoke to and what you spoke about. You couldn't be sure who was colluding with the enemy.

The partisans who were fighting with the British forces would burn strips of bush in the mountains and place guiding lights so that planes could drop off supplies of food, clothing and ammunition during the night to fight against the Germans. The

Germans were going from village to village looking for these partisans and there was a great deal of fear and uncertainty during these times. On one occasion my father and his party of friends were getting ready to set off for the valley in order to do timber cutting, which was to be used to barter for food, when the Germans came into the village. They were looking for Jovan Tsitsulev because he was working with the partisans. When one of dad's friends saw the Germans coming, he panicked and hid in the neighbour's alley. The Germans burnt down Jovan Tsitsulev's house and when they caught my father's friend hiding, they decided to throw him in the fire as well. Luckily his mother arrived just in time crying and pleading for her son to be released. After a lot of pleading, they finally released him. Lazo Vlahov, who was village mayor at the time, was present but did not speak up to say that the man they were about to burn alive was not the man that they were looking for. Lazo must have been in shock.

During the German/Bulgarian occupation of Greece there was total chaos. There was no food, no school, no work – just fear, starvation and death. People were dying on the side of roads through starvation and others so desperate for food were eating newspapers to try and stay alive. There was a lot of stealing and looting during these times. People were stealing from each other. Some would go to someone else's field, steal what they could find and then take these items back to their field. There was no one you could complain to if you suspected someone had stolen your goods. Often people took matters into their own hands when dealing with these sorts of issues.

Our family decided to leave everything behind in Neret and go to Bitola (Republic of Macedonia). Dad got work cutting and preparing timber to make coffins for an undertaker. It was close to where we were living, and I could go to a Bulgarian primary school. The Bulgarian army controlled the former Yugoslav region and set up Bulgarian schools in the parts under their jurisdiction. In my lifetime I had in total approximately 4 years of schooling – 2 in Greek back in Neret and 2 in Bulgarian in Bitola and sadly, no schooling in Macedonian. Towards the end of the second world war and after 2 years in Bitola, mum was becoming home sick. She managed to persuade dad to shift back to the village. It proved to be a bad decision because my father had to give up a good job and in the ensuing years, we were to encounter even more hardship and brutal killings brought about by the civil war.

During the Second World War, I would often travel with my father and a few of the other village men cutting timber. We would travel to Voden, Karajoa (a region near the town of Sabotsko), and the Lerinsko polije (lower, flat land near Lerin). I was too young at this stage to go to Sveti Gora as you had to be a male over 14 to be allowed entry. We would travel on foot with equipment such as thick woollen blankets (chergi), saws (bichkij), axes (bultutsi) and shovels (lopati) strapped on to our backs. We would lay down to sleep wherever we got to when it got dark. Because I was the youngest, I would often be sent to knock on doors asking for bread to eat. It was felt that being a young boy, there would be a far greater chance of someone feeling sorry for me and giving me food than in comparison to the older men. On most occasions I was

fortunate enough to receive some bread and if I were lucky, I would get a bit of cheese as well. In the end we survived during the German times but what was to follow was even greater hardship and darker times.

During the period when we went logging (na bitchkia) on one occasion we went during winter, on foot, all the way from Neret to the region of Karajoa working north of the town of Sabotsko near the border. We had to negotiate rough terrain around mountains (some 200km) to get there. Dad was a well-known tradesman in Karajoa and found it easy to obtain work. We were doing work for Popo Tsaklis (priest) who was building a church. We were there for several weeks felling very large trees (platani). These trees were so large that they couldn't be placed on trestles (skelije). It was decided that the only way we could work the timber was to dig a hole so 2 people could get inside and work from below, whilst one worked from above. In this way, we were able to cut the timber into smaller, more manageable lengths that could be trimmed and shaped into different sized lengths that were able to be used for construction of buildings. Dad was a very skilled worker. His axe work was so good that at times it was difficult to tell if the timber had been cut by an axe or by a saw.

It was the day before Christmas and my father said, if I wanted to, I could leave and hopefully make it home in time for Christmas. I, being a naïve, young 13-year-old boy, said yes. So, at about 3pm on the 6th January 1944 (Orthodox Christmas eve) I set off to go back to Neret. I had no money, not even one coin in my pocket. All I had was the clothes on my back, and they were struggling to keep me warm. An old

thin jacket was no match for the cold winter's night which was to follow.

Neret was a long way from where we were and the only hope of getting back in time was to get lifts from passing vehicles. I would jump onto the back of slower moving trucks hoping that the driver would not see me. When they would realise that I was clinging to the back of their vehicle they would stop and force me to get off. I did this several times and by night fall I had reached Voden which was still about 100km from Neret. When I left Voden I managed to jump onto the back of a truck but as before I would be thrown off when the driver realised that I was hanging onto the back of his vehicle. I would then keep walking hoping for another vehicle to come by. As it got later in the evening the flow of vehicles along the roads diminished. By 11pm I had reached Lake Ostrovo.

From Ostrovo, I headed towards Lerin via Gornichevo on foot. Wolves were lined up on the mountain side. I had nothing for protection – not even a stick to fend off any possible attack. Luckily, as I was going up a steep part of the road towards Lerin, an army truck came by. This truck was transporting frozen meat. They stopped and asked me where I was going. I told them that I was heading for Lerin. They said “We’re headed that way too so if you want, you can jump in the back but you will need to be in the freezer.” As if it wasn’t bad enough being winter and wearing light, damp clothing, I would have to endure a long ride sitting on the meat truck’s damp, icy floor. By the time I got to Lerin I was nearly frozen stiff, and my skin was starting to turn purple.

What do I do? Do I try and find somewhere to stay, or do I continue the journey? Neret was now within reach, only about 20km away and I decided to continue walking. By the time I got to Mala which is about half- way between Lerin and Neret it had reached midnight. Having reached Mala I had another decision to make – do I keep going (as Neret now seemed in touching distance) or do I wake up the Temoi family, that we knew well, and hope that they would put me up for the night?

I knocked on their front door and thankfully they opened it and let me in. I slept in their home overnight. When I was working with my father, the night before we had slept at a vodenitsa (water driven mill) but the place was riddled with fleas and we had all become infested. As a result, I unfortunately infested the poor Temoi family as well. It was bad enough waking them up in the middle of the night, but I also gave them an extra job that they could have done without.

In the early hours of the next morning (Christmas Day) I set off on foot for Neret, arriving there at about 10am. When my mother saw me and the state that I was in, she broke down and cried. She was shocked that dad would send off a young boy on his own with no food and no money to travel nearly 200km in the snow in the middle of winter. Mum got one of the neighbour's girls, Fania Milea, to help pick off the fleas from my body.

Another memory of when we were timber cutting in Sveti Gora was that of when I would be left in the bush during the weekend to clean all the workmen's clothes. I had to pretend that I was over 14 years of age because you weren't allowed in

the region unless you were over 14 (an area controlled by monks). Dad and the other men would all leave in the morning and go into a town called Karies to buy food and return in the evening. I placed all the garments into a big drum and boiled them for hours on end. I had no idea that I should be separating the coloureds from the whites. In the end everything came out looking grey. No one complained – I think they were just happy to have clean clothes – the colour was of little consequence. On many occasions we would be short of something, eg cooking oil, and I would be sent out at night walking through mountainous forests to purchase what was needed. We would also, on occasions, have a person that would come through with mules loaded with wine that my father and his workers would purchase.

On another occasion, my uncle Tanas Kirev (one of dad's relatives), fell gravely ill one night. We didn't know what to do. We were in the middle of nowhere – medical help was a long way away. We thought he was going to die. Dad wet some warm woollen cloths with kerosene and wiped his body all over with them. Uncle Tanas sweated out all this fluid in blistered form. It seemed to do the trick and we believe that is what saved him.

On another occasion we were lumbering near Voden in a village called Vladovo. We were doing work for a villager who was making wooden carts and wooden wheels for carts. We were there for 30 days and for most of these days we faced lightning and rain and it was almost always in the afternoon at around 4 pm.

The man that we were working for would supply the food for us. He would come to where we were working in the bush and drop off food for us each day. While we were there, dad ended up with a bad stomach-ache. That day dad ate meat whilst the rest of us ate other things. We found out afterwards that the meat was cooked in a copper utensil. Dad obviously had copper poisoning, but we were not to know that at the time. Whilst dad was writhing in pain, we were gathering around him crying helplessly – we were trying to think how we could help him. We ended up giving dad copious amounts of water and sugar and luckily, he pulled through. I don't know if it was the water and sugar that helped him, or if it was just luck.

Money was worthless during the time of German occupation of Greece, but we did very well in comparison to others. We were able to barter for the 30 days' work that we had done and in exchange we received a large amount of wheat. Dad sewed up velentsinia (large woven woollen blankets) using large needles that he would normally use to make saddles. These makeshift bags were used to place all the wheat that we were given. The man that we worked for was kind enough to transport these bags full of wheat to a nearby railway station. We then transported this wheat to Lerin by rail and then used mules to complete the rest of the journey to Neret.

DURING WAR (GREEK CIVIL WAR)

After the end of the German invasion, the Greek royalty and high-ranking officers who had fled the country were, with the help of the British, brought back to Greece. In the meantime, the Communist-dominated National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS) of which many Macedonian partisans were a part of, controlled the country. The British navy arrived in Athens and told everyone to put down their arms and to vote to see who was to govern - otherwise they would start bombing. The pro-communist ELAS put down their arms but once they did, many were placed in prison. As a result, further escalation of violence occurred. This started the Greek civil war (1946-1949) between ELAS and the republican Greek National Democratic Union (EDES).

The ELAS said that they would help give the Macedonians more rights after the war – schools, language, religion, etc. Our Macedonian brigades fought together with them but as it turned out in the end they too would turn against our people. I believe most Macedonians wouldn't have even understood what communism was all about but simply sided with an organisation that was willing to help our cause – freedom from oppression.

The partisans would attack at night and hide in the mountains during the day. Large numbers of people were killed from both sides. You would not know if the person you were speaking to was a pro government sympathiser or a pro partisan sympathiser. Neret was a reasonably large village but by the end of the civil war, there wouldn't be a house that

didn't have a member killed due to the fighting. I remember it well – Mrtva Sabota (the day of giving for the dead – the day before Easter (Veligden). The civil war had finished, and everyone was at church with buns waiting to offer food for their loved ones (soldiers) when they came home.

Unfortunately, many did not return as they had been killed. The church was filled with a sea of tears as not one household remained unaffected by the loss of a loved one.

During the fighting, the Greek government decided to shift all the people who lived in the mountainous villages down to villages in the valley so that the partisans would find it hard to seek assistance (food, shelter, etc).

We went to Armenevo, a village just northeast of Lerin. We were forced to live with other families that we didn't even know – it was hard on us as well as the families that had to put us up. We had no work, we were hungry, and we were getting in their way. After a short period of time, we decided to go back to our village without the authorities knowing so that we could tend to our fields and grow crops to feed ourselves. We had a beautiful crop of wheat that year but couldn't harvest it because as soon as you went out into the field you would face machine gun fire – again we struggled for food.

There were many atrocities that occurred during the civil war. From my village, my Striko Risto Kirev's shura (brother-in-law), Tanas Tolev (who was the village mayor at the time – appointed by the partisans) was hiding from the Greek army but was dobbed in. The Greek soldiers pulled him out of his hiding spot and stoned him to death.

In another incident, Tanas Velov's wife had been making bread and her younger daughter was helping her by flipping dough and placing it in the oven. The Greek army arrived, coming down the Giamova Plotcha, and for no reason killed her daughter in front of her. Why kill her? You could argue that her mother had done something – maybe she was working with the partisans, but to kill the young girl – why?

Gina Staceva, also from Neret, was killed at an area called the Rachische Bojino Dere (creek) by Greek soldiers because her son was a partisan. They mutilated her body – ripping open her stomach, removing her private parts, cutting out her eyes, nose, and ears. This lady was a hardworking family focussed person who cared for everyone. Why mutilate her? What had she done that warranted such a thing to be done to her? These were the sort of things that happened often but who could you go and complain to? These sorts of unimaginable things seem like dreams, but they weren't – they happened.

On our way back from one occasion when I had gone with my father to Sveti Gora to do timber cutting, when we got to Solun (Thessaloniki), the Greek authorities refused us travel beyond that point. We had to remain in Solun for 30 days. We were finally allowed to travel back towards Neret but when we got to Lerin we were again held up because of the fighting. I stayed in Lerin with Risto Tashev (one of dad's relatives) whilst dad went on to Nevoleni (just outside on the southern side of Lerin) where he found work making saddles. My mother and younger siblings joined dad in Nevoleni because they couldn't stay in Neret. We were all caught up in the

fighting and it would be 2 years before I would be able to go back to my village.

Whilst I was stranded in Lerin, Risto Tashev taught me how to become a shrewd businessman. I used a wheelbarrow in which I placed chocolates, peanuts, lollies, etc and I would go around to places where there may be gatherings, or I would simply pick a street corner where there may be a greater traffic flow of people so that I could sell these items and try and earn some money. This was whilst the civil war was raging around me. On one occasion the partisans started bombing the town with cannon fire (topje). Just a short distance from where I was, there was a young boy selling cakes – he was yelling out “Fresh cakes, fresh cakes.” A young girl came out of her home and called for him to get back inside and shelter from the bombing. She yelled out to him “Can’t you see that there is bombing happening – get inside now”. She got the boy (presumably her brother) inside, but meanwhile another bomb went off before she could get inside, and she was struck in the head by shrapnel and died. She was the daughter of one of the directors of the hospital in Lerin.

On another occasion when I was selling chocolates from my wheelbarrow, a bomb struck the timber railing of the balcony directly above me. I walked away without a scratch, but the timber was in pieces. I think someone must have been looking over me as there were many close calls where I could quite easily have been killed.

The apartment where I was living in was right next door to a travel agency. The father of two young children must have

been signing paperwork in one room whilst the children were in another. When the bombing started, the two young children got frightened and raced outside the building just as another bomb went off – they were both killed.

On another occasion, the Greek army had gathered at the old bazaar when suddenly the partisans started bombing. Many Greek soldiers were killed.

The Greek army burned down houses belonging to families known to be partisan fighters and the partisans would burn down houses of Greek sympathisers. There were thousands of people in jails such as the island of Makrinos, Kerkira and Endicole (underground jail in Solun). Quite often it was just a case of someone going to the authorities and making a statement about you and that was enough to get you thrown in jail. You had no way of proving your innocence in these lawless times.

An example of this is Neret man Velo Gazilainov (Filippou). Velo was being stirred by a prosvika (Greeks who were previously living in Turkey and were resettled because of the mass exchange of people between Greece and Turkey) who asked Velo what language he would like to speak in – Greek or Macedonian. Velo replied to him “What would you like to eat – honey or shit.” The prosvika replied “I would like to eat honey.” So Velo replied “Well in that case you had better speak in Macedonian.” Velo was dobbed into the police, and he ended up being thrown in jail. That’s where he spent the rest of his life and was only let out just before he died. Similarly, Petre Ristovichin also spent the rest of his life in jail

where he ended up dying. The authorities also took his home away from him.

Neighbours would have arguments over trivial things. To settle the score, one would say that the other was a partisan (Macedonian sympathiser) and the police would throw him in jail. On the flip side you could be dobbed into the partisans by someone claiming that you were a Greek sympathiser, and they would kill you even if you weren't.

Lerin was a strategic town that the partisans were desperately trying to take over. On this one particular day, the Greek army had a large number of troops on the ground as they had gained information that the partisans were going to hold an all-out attack to try and overrun the Greek army and take over the town. The night before, I could hear gunfire in the streets. When daylight came, there was continual machine gun fire and mortar bombing (olmi) all around the area near Sveti Marco which is between Lerin and Nevoleni.

The partisans would move in and then get pushed back. They would again move in towards town, then as before, get pushed back again, and so on. I would view things as they were happening from the balcony of the unit that I was living in. The grounds were littered with dead and dying from both sides. After the fighting subsided, the Greek army still maintained control of Lerin. They picked up their injured and dead and took them away. They then brought in trucks (not ambulances) and picked up the dead and wounded partisans. They would pick up these bodies as if they were logs laying on the white snow and throw them into the back of the trucks.

The bodies were taken to a field and laid out on top of the snow which was stained with blood. A large mass grave was made, and all were buried. It was said that some of these partisan soldiers may have been badly injured but not necessarily dead before they were buried. I was told that 812 had died in that round of fighting alone. Many of the dead were Macedonians because both the partisans and the Greek army were made up of Macedonians - sometimes brother would be pitted against brother.

Towards the end of the Civil War many children were sent out of the war zone to numerous countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, and Yugoslavia. My wife to be (Ristana Dimova/Popova) was one of these refugees (begultsi) who ended up in Serbia. The borders were closed after the war and many who left because they were considered communist sympathisers and traitors, were never allowed to return to Greece and see their families again. This hard-line tactic held by the Greek government, to some degree even up to today, only fuelled more resentment. My immediate family lives in Australia now and even though we are free to speak Macedonian and practice our religion, my grandchildren can barely speak any Macedonian and have taken on the Australian way of life. We have no animosity, but in fact only admiration, for what Australia has given us. This could have been the same in Greece, but the Greek governments have gone about things in exactly the opposite way. Our people suffered and the Greek people suffered as well.

There was constant bombing and very bloody fighting with Gramos falling first and finally Vitcho but not until the British

got involved to assist the Greek army. When the Civil War had pretty much ended, the ELAS, who were previously fighting together with the Macedonian brigades, turned their attention to driving the Macedonian brigades out of Greece.

I can recall when the ELAS troops with their heavily laden mules came through Neret and headed west through Turie towards Prespa to fight the Macedonian brigade headed by Goce Kimargia. They drove the Macedonian brigade back until it crossed over the border and headed towards Bitola. In the end, the Macedonian people were back where they were before – under the oppressive rule of the Greek government.

After the Civil War, many people decided to leave their villages and head off to the USA, Canada, or Australia but that wasn't an easy process either. If you were dobbed in as siding with the partisans, you wouldn't be able to leave Greece (more likely to spend time in jail instead). You needed to have a clean record to leave. Because I spent most of my time with my father and went to work with him wherever he went, I had a clean record and so was able to come to Australia.

STRAIGHT AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

The population of the village had drastically reduced mainly due to casualties sustained in the bitter fighting during the wars. Even though the morale in the village was somewhat subdued as many were in mourning after having lost loved ones, the village still proceeded with the three days of Easter celebrations. From Good Friday to Easter Sunday the village square was alive to the sounds of drums beating and ora (traditional dancing in a circle). It was mainly the younger ones who danced whilst the women would gather around the outskirts of the dancing and watch on.

Two members of the Neretski band at the time were Mitre Genchev on clarinet and Risto Novachkov (nicknamed Baikolo) on drums. Risto's drum had a really strong skin that could take quite a pounding. Mikhaeli Genchev was only recently married at the time and was part of the group of boys I played and hung around with. Not once did Mikhaeli and I ever fight or argue growing up. Mikhaeli was a very friendly, lovable, and compassionate person. As he was recently married, he wanted to lead an oro. He asked his father Mitre if he could lead an oro. His father said "After this one". The day went by, and it was always 'after this one'. The same thing happened on the second day of celebrations. Early on the third day Mikhaeli said "Dad, play me an oro and if it's about money, I will pay you." His father kept saying I will play for you soon.

Mikhaeli rounded up all of our friends and we went to my store to have some drinks. Mikhaeli decided that he had had enough of his father constantly ignoring his plea to lead an oro,

so he was going to take matters into his own hands. Mikhaeli had decided that if he wasn't going to be given an oro then no one else was. He had decided to break the musicians' instruments.

After a few drinks to help him muster up the courage and with the rest of the boys as support should things get out of hand and fighting erupt, we walked down to stret selo.

Mikhaeli once again asked his father "Will you play an oro for me?" His father came up with the same reply – "After this one". Mikhaeli then snatched his father's clarinet out of his mouth whilst he was playing and flung it some distance, striking rocks but surprisingly not breaking. From there he tried to pierce the skin on the drum by giving it several swift kicks but was unsuccessful. Mikhaeli then grabbed the drum with both hands and then kneed it until the skin was pierced.

Risto, the drummer, was enraged that his expensive skin was ruined. We said to him not to worry as we would cover the cost of the damage caused.

Unfortunately, whilst Mikhaeli was breaking the musicians' equipment, we didn't take note that the person leading the oro was a karafilok (policeman). The policeman was Risto Dula, Fania Trenoa's husband. If we had known, we would have waited for the next oro. By destroying the instruments whilst the policeman was leading, it appeared that it was done as some form of protest against the local constabulary. Hearing the commotion, the astinomo (head of police in Neret) came and gave Mikhaeli a massive slap to the face. Having witnessed Mikhaeli receiving a slap to the face, his Teta

Stoyanka, who was a large, strong, solid woman grabbed the astinomo, spun him around several times and sent him sprawling to the ground with his feet up in the air. All of the villagers gathered around him, laughing at what had happened. Mikhaeli's aunty said "I'll show you, you filthy dog, who's nephew you are belting. I'll show you a beating."

The police took Mikhaeli away and locked him up. To make sure that he didn't receive a beating in jail one of his friends decided to go in jail with him to act as a witness should Mikhaeli be unfairly treated.

Somehow word about the incident got to Mitre Bakalis (Pop (priest) Tome's son) who was head of police in Rosen. Mitre is a relative of the Genchev family. I think Pop Tome's wife and Mikhaeli's baba were sisters. Mitre arrived in Neret a few hours later in his jeep and organised soon after for Mikhaeli's release. Mikhaeli was lucky to have got away with things as lightly as he did.

Mikhaeli would come regularly to my store to catch up with me and our friends. Unfortunately he didn't have money to shout his friends and that made him uneasy. He would often say that it was embarrassing receiving drinks from everyone and not being able to reciprocate the gesture. We kept saying to him not to worry and that there will come a time when he will have money and that he will be able to buy us drinks.

Sadly, it wasn't long after the Easter incident that he lost his life trying to earn some money disarming a land mine.

After the Civil War had finished in 1949, quite a few people were killed or maimed from uncleared land mines. Many farmers accidentally detonated these land mines whilst ploughing fields.

Mikhaeli, my neighbour and closest friend, was removing detonators and dismantling land mines so he could make money by selling the metal (copper). He was very young, only about 19 years of age, and recently married. He wanted to be able to buy his wife something special because some of the other newly wedded men in the village had given their wives something, but he hadn't. We were always telling him off, and for him not to go and handle these land mines because they were far too dangerous to play around with. Unfortunately, because he was so poor, he felt that this was the only way he could make some money. Mikhaeli's father had sheep and was reasonably well off but, in those days, the older people were a bit unreasonable and unwilling to part with what they had in order to help the struggling, younger members of the family.

Unfortunately, when Mikhaeli was trying to dismantle one of these mines, it accidentally went off in his hands. I heard the explosion and had an uneasy feeling that he was involved because it was only the night before that I had been talking to him and telling him not to risk dismantling these mines. I had a little store that I was running at the time and when I heard the bang, I dropped everything, and I raced up to where he was. I found him lying on the ground. He wasn't crying nor yelling out. I started talking to him. "Mikhaeli, what have you done?" He said "I have no arms, no legs. I've seen, I have neither arms nor legs."

He had dragged himself quite some distance down the mountain slope from where the initial blast had occurred without limbs. I, to this day, can't comprehend how he did it. I tried to reassure him by saying "You have arms and you have legs," even though I could see that he didn't and was in a very bad way. The blast was so devastating that it had blown his hands off and I could see veins protruding from his body as if they were spaghetti and some of his insides were hanging outside his body – it is something that no man should endure and no man should have to witness.

I took off my jacket, pushed his insides back in and wrapped up his body. I also took off my belt and strapped him together as best as I could. His parents arrived soon after and they were screaming and yelling. The shock was so great that his mother fainted. With the help of some of the other villagers, Mikhaeli was taken to Lerin to seek medical assistance. He was a very strong man and considering the injuries he received from the blast, he still survived for another 24 hours. Unfortunately, the heavy blood loss was too great, and he couldn't be saved.

I will digress for a moment whilst talking about Mikhaeli Genchev.

After my sister Fania died in 2010, my son George and his wife Anne convinced me to go back with them to see my sister Ristana and my brother-in-law Risto before I would become too frail to travel. Over 60 years after Mikhaeli's death, I returned to my village in 2011 after not having been back from the time I left in 1955. Straight after arriving in Neret and meeting my sister Ristana and brother-in-law Risto and placing

our luggage in the rooms where we were staying, we were all excited to walk through the village and in my case to see what changes had happened over the time that I had been away. The real astonishing thing is that the very first person that we came across as we were walking through the village was a lady called Lefa. We started talking and Lefa asked who we were and whether we were from this village. After I told her I was born in Neret, and she roughly worked out my age, she asked if I knew her brother, Mikhaeli Genchev, who was quite a few years older than herself. I said that I knew him very well and that he was my best friend. Lefa told me that on the day that he had been killed she was being looked after by relatives in a neighbouring village and being quite young, was never really told exactly what had happened. I told Lefa I can tell you exactly what had happened. As I started telling her what had happened, we all broke down in tears. Instead of talking in the street, Lefa asked if she could meet with me so we could talk some more about the past. We ended up meeting and chatting a few more times before my short, three-week stay was over.

I was told Mikhaeli's wife remarried. Mikhaeli's wife was a lovely woman from the Vlaoi (Vlahos) family. She married a man from Kalinik. Whenever they visited Neret to see friends and relatives they would always light a candle for Mikhaeli.



My four best friends I grew up with in Neret. The photo was taken in Stretselo (village square. From left to right: Me, Mikhaeli Genchev, Vasil Markov, Vangel Markov and Tanas Andriov. Circa 1947.



The Village square in 2011. It is amazing how much it has changed in 74 years.

I enjoyed catching up with my sister Ristana and her family and a few of the people I had known from my younger days in the village who were still alive. The village had changed greatly in that time with now only about 300 residents remaining. Many of the nivie (fields that were used for agriculture) were now overrun by thick scrub. Most of the younger people had moved to the larger towns in search of work and only the more senior residents of the village appeared to have an interest tending to their plots of land. When I left to go back home to Perth, my sister and I embraced each other for the last time and she said “This is probably the last time that we will ever see each other in person.” She was right – sadly nine

years later in 2020 she died from complications caused by a broken hip.

After the Civil War I went back to the village and ran a small store for a few years and applied my skills learned in Lerin. Ideally, I would like to have kept living in Lerin and to open a store there, but it was felt it would be best for all of us to go back to Neret and try and get some semblance of family unity again.

Towards the end of 1953, I did 18 months of national service. Initially, I was based just outside Solun in an area called Corintho. When I arrived there, they were looking for people that may have had some sort of experience other than just that of being a farmer. They needed someone who could do the ordering and shopping to feed the troops and was able to do basic office duties. I had a bit of experience because I ran my little business in the village and from my time in Lerin selling goods. My grasp of the Greek language was also quite good considering I only had two years of primary schooling. Having to converse with Greek teachers and policemen who would frequent my store improved my vocabulary immensely.

We were lined up and each one of us was asked what previous work experience we had. One after the other the answer was shepherd or farmer. When they got to me, I said that I was a shopkeeper. They said “Where have you been hiding? Put down your gun and come with us.” From Monday to Friday, I was doing shopping for the army in Solun. A few months later, from there, I was transferred to Nesrum, a town not far from Kostur. After a few days being there, the officers called me

into their office and said they had heard that I was educated and that they would like me to work in the army post office. I didn't let on that I had minimal schooling but simply went along with their requests. I enjoyed my time working in the post office.

I was lucky in that I only had to do 18 months national service because the government couldn't afford to keep soldiers too long because it didn't have the finances. Previously, soldiers had to serve for three to four years.

Some photos of my time doing national service from 1953 to early 1955.





MY MOVE TO AUSTRALIA

After I finished national service, I went to Lerin for a short while and then back to Neret. There was still a great deal of poverty and very few job opportunities. Even though it was difficult leaving loved ones behind, I decided to leave for Australia in search of a better life as I had endured my fair share of adverse times. I organised my own papers and with the financial help of relatives in Australia, I made the move. I left in 1955 and it wasn't until 2011, some 56 years later, before I would see my village again.

I came on the British ship Oronsay which was one of the most modern ships of its day. It was decked out in beautiful carpets, mirrors, and fittings. Petre Popov (another Neret resident) who went onto Melbourne told me to make sure I choose a British ship because they're the best. I could have come out on a religious ship for 10 pounds but decided to go with the more luxurious ship.

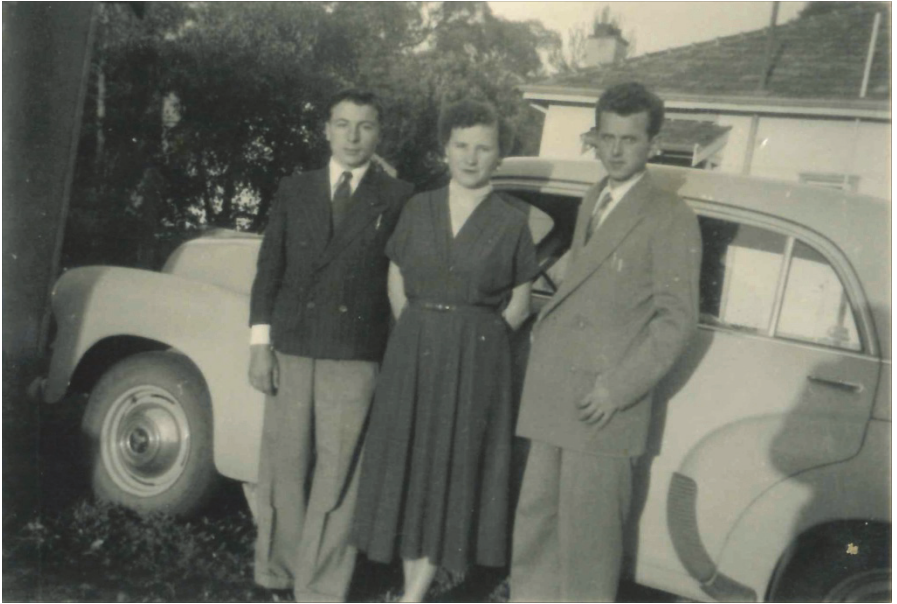
On Wednesday 3rd June 1955, after several weeks at sea, I arrived in Fremantle on board the British ship "Oronsay". On the following Monday, 5 days after having arrived, my sister Fania's fiancé, Petre Kitin took me to Midland, where he worked at the Railways Workshop, in the hope of finding me work. Fania was still in Neret but had agreed to marry Petre – photos were exchanged and relatives in each village (Neret and Krepešina) vouched for each person's character. This is how quite a few of the marriages were organised in those days. Petre organised for Fania to come to Perth soon after and they were married. There was a shortage of men back in

the villages as many had been killed in the Civil War or left in search of work. On the flip side, there was a shortage of Macedonian women in Australia.

Photos of me on deck with other travellers on the ship Oronsay on my way to Fremantle in 1955.







I am greeted by my first cousins, Mitre Marin and his sister, Vangelia Toleva.

Petre was unable to secure a job for me at the railways workshop so he organised a return rail ticket so that I could get back home. On the way back, I got confused and thought that I had reached the city station, but I got off one stop too early - at East Perth. When I disembarked, the conductor took my ticket before I realized that I had gotten off at the wrong station. I now had to figure out how to work my way back home. Soon after, another train came by. I jumped onto it and got off at the city station which was only a short distance away. When I tried to disembark, I was asked for my ticket. I didn't know what to do. I was aware of what the conductor was asking for, but I couldn't explain what had happened prior. I pulled out what little money I had in my pocket and gestured

for him to take what he needed. The conductor obviously didn't know how many stops to charge me for. Whilst they were trying to figure out what to do with me, I was detained in a small office. I had been there for a while when I noticed that the man that initially stopped me, was talking to another person and they had moved some distance from the office that I was in. I used the opportunity to make a run for it. When they realised I had made a run for it, they started shouting for me to stop, but I just kept running.



My Teta Stoina and Tetin Risto Karamfilov drove from Manjimup to Fremantle to greet me. Both photos were taken at my Vuijko Stojan and Vuijna Stojanka Marin's house in Carlisle, Perth.

After I thought it was safe, I needed to board a train from the city to get to the Carlisle train station. The Carlisle station is on a different line to that of the Midland station which I had been on previously. At that time, I was living with my Vujko Stoian Marin (Stan Graikos) who is my mother's brother and the Carlisle station was nearby. I needed to obtain a ticket but had difficulty pronouncing Carlisle. I broke up Carlisle into 3 syllables and tried pronouncing it phonetically, Car-lis-le. The man at the city station kept saying "no such station". I must have spent half an hour trying to pronounce Carlisle and finally, purely by luck, I pronounced Carlisle the way it should be, and I was given a ticket. Finally, after taking me the greater part of the day, I was home.

The following day, my first cousin Mitre Marin (Jim Graikos), took me to where he was working in the hope of securing me a job. This time I was in luck and on the Wednesday, exactly one week after arriving in Australia, I started working at Cullity Timbers. I had no grasp of the English language and I'm pretty sure they gave me the job thinking that I was Italian. The factory had quite a few Italians working there at the time, and they thought that I would be able to converse with assistance from some of the other Italian workers. Jim and I were the only Macedonians working at Cullity Timbers.

We were not welcomed by the Australian workers who had a dislike of foreigners as they were negatively perceived as taking up jobs that could have gone to the locals and, Italians in particular, due to their part in the Second World War. We were constantly subjected to verbal obscenities and rude gestures. I was, on a daily basis, having bits of timber thrown

at the bench saw that I was working with. I was worried about having an eye poked out or receiving a nasty injury. I had had enough! One particular day, the worker who was the greatest offender, needed to go to the toilet. The toilets were opposite from where I was working and there were two entrances – one at either end.

I raced into the toilet from the opposite side to where the worker entered, hid behind a wall, and waited for him. I used the opportunity to knock him out and leave him face down in the urinal trough. I calmly returned to my work bench and continued working as if nothing had happened. I think he worked out who hit him but couldn't pin it on me because he wasn't 100 per cent sure. I had only just finished military service before I came to Australia, so I was fit because I had been put through rigorous workouts.

The actual work at Cullity Timbers didn't faze me as I was used to working hard my whole life, but the continual harassment was unbearable. Every day I would be hounded to fight after work. An Italian employee who worked opposite me helped diffuse things somewhat by saying that they would have to contend with him if they didn't leave me alone but, in the end, they didn't let up.

One night after work, one of the Australian workers grabbed my hat and went to the toilet with it. When he returned, the hat was wet. He said that he had peed on it. I pretended that I thought it was a joke and I had a smile on my face but inside I was fuming. The worker pulled out a card from his pocket and flashed it at me. The card was to inform me that he was a

trained boxer, but I had no idea at the time what he was trying to tell me. I waited till he got close to me and before he was aware of what was happening, I laid into him with a flurry of punches. I cut his eyebrow open and when he fell backwards, I placed my knees into his stomach and went for his throat. When he fell backwards, he had broken his arm. He was yelling out “This is not allowed”, as he was expecting me to box fairly – I couldn’t have cared less as this was an opportunity to lay into him. Unknown to us at the time, there was a foreman watching from a mezzanine floor above us and he witnessed what had happened.

The following day, the injured worker tried to claim workers compensation by saying that he had tripped over a trolley and that is how he obtained his injuries. The foreman told the manager how the worker obtained his injuries. The manager came to me and gestured by throwing punches. I thought that he also wanted to fight me. In my mind I was thinking “What the hell is going on in this place.” I then realised that he was asking me what had happened. I, as best as I could, tried to explain that the other worker had urinated in my cap and that is why we fought. He left and the other worker was sacked.

Whilst at Cullity timbers, some of the other workers were telling me to slow down and not work so fast. They kept telling me to have a rest – even to go and have a short nap in the drying kilns if I wanted to because I was showing them up as not working hard enough. I wasn’t afraid of hard work as this is what I had been used to. I couldn’t do what they asked – it just wasn’t me. I also felt that I needed to work that little bit harder to make sure I kept my job.

One day I had cut to length and stacked about 250 layers of timber on a pallet. Most other workers would only complete about 25-30 in a day. A senior staff member arrived and took note, writing in his notebook, what I had done. Soon after, two senior staff members arrived with a jack and moved my pallet close to their office and then proceeded to dismantle the timber to check to see if I had done the work properly. The manager came soon after and asked me how I managed to get so much good work done. I understood basically what he was asking so I pointed to my muscles as a laugh and shrugged my shoulders.

The manager later summonsed all the other workers and had a talk to them about their lack of productivity. When the management were taking notes about my work, I thought I was in trouble for not doing a good enough job when it was the other way around.

When the manager was talking to the other workers about the need to work harder, one of them got irate and punched him, knocking him to the ground and laying him out. There were two foremen who stood and watched the manager get beaten up. After this incident, the manager sacked the disgruntled worker as well as the two foremen for not coming to his aid.

From that point on, I got on very well with management. I was given many different roles – quite often helping in the areas wherever someone was missing due to illness. I was getting paid well but needed to do overtime because I was paying my Vuijko Stoian four pounds for board each week and I had to pay back 250 pounds for my trip to Australia. These amounts

may not seem great, but at the time, they were considerable. It took me about one year just to pay off my fare out to Australia. My aunty in Manjimup, Teta Stoina (mum's sister), and Tetin Risto Karamfilov had sent the money to my mother so I could pay for my fare.

MY TIME IN MANJIMUP

Manjimup is a small timber and farming town 300 kilometres south of Perth. My aunty, Teta Stoina, told me about a nice girl in town. Her name was Ristana Popova /Dimova (or Dimou in Greek). Her family was referred to as Popova because her grandfather Georgi was a priest. Ristana's family are from Turie which is a neighbouring village to Neret. A few weeks after meeting Ristana, I shifted to Manjimup and then on the 15th of September 1957, we were married at St Martin's Church of England. Prolonged engagements and courtships were non-existent for our people at that time – you had to be pretty much married before you could go out together. We were fortunate enough to have two boys, George, born 30th October 1958 and John, born on 9th October 1961.

We had many people attend our wedding. Well over 400 people crammed into the Manjimup town hall, with many making the 300km trip from Perth. Early the next morning straight after the wedding and only having had a couple of hours sleep, there was a knock at the door for my new bride and I to get up so we could work on my fathers-in-law's tobacco crop. That is where we spent our honeymoon. You would think we would be cut some slack for at least one day.

During my first year in Manjimup, Ristana and I agreed to work for my father-in-law. We were to be paid \$1000 pounds for the year which was pretty good money at the time. Unfortunately, it proved to be extremely hard, relentless work, for more often than not seven days a week. On the farm we used extremely toxic pesticides such as Dieldrin and Metasystox to control insects and weeds, both of which have

since been banned. We would tend to the crops, weeding and watering during the day and spraying in the evenings when it was cooler. We never wore masks when using the insecticides and often walked through the misty spray. God only knows how neither of us got sick later in life as a result. My father-in-law would, at times, receive pleas for help from other growers who needed assistance with their tobacco crops and in doing so, would send Ristana and I to help out.

I learned my lesson from that first year and in the following year, 1959, I leased out some of my father-in-law's farm and we worked the land ourselves. We made very good money from that year's tobacco crop as we did in the following year. We used much of these earnings to build new kilns and 2-storeyed drying and bailing sheds. Unfortunately, all of this money that Ristana and I sunk into infrastructure was to prove a waste as the tobacco industry in Western Australia folded in 1961. There were warnings that the industry was going to fold and that no more tobacco was to be sourced from Western Australia and shipped to the Eastern States for processing, but many growers dismissed it as rumours, especially many growers of Macedonian background who were not able to read and communicate efficiently.

Financially I was back to square one again - penniless. I had to start all over again and the first thing was to look for work. I firstly went to seek work at a timber mill in Palgarup (which is a very small town just outside of Manjimup) but was told that there was no work available. I believe that they feared I would not commit for a long enough period and instead would leave soon after if new work opened on farms.

I then went to the local shire council in Manjimup. They also said that there was no work available at that moment, but I was asked what sort of skills I possessed. I said that I could do construction work. My father-in-law had constructed all his tobacco buildings and when the time came to construct mine, we worked together, and I learned a lot from him. By the time I had finished, I was able to construct a timber roof and do bricklaying, a requirement for building kilns.

Bill Crombie was the person who I spoke to and as I was leaving, he called me back and asked me if I could bricklay walls. I said that I was confident that I could do it and he said OK you can start tomorrow. Initially I started doing paving and roadside curbs. Gradually I worked my way up to the position of leading hand. I also learned how to use a theodolite so I could do surveying tasks. I used these skills to help with drainage and sewerage works. I grew in confidence to the point where I was given the task of marking out and erecting the support posts for the fence around the Manjimup Sanctuary (this is now the Manjimup Timber Museum). I also coordinated the construction of a new road through thick bush near Quinninup. I marked out everything and everyone followed behind me – bulldozers, graders, trucks, rollers etc. Whilst at the shire council, I also learned how to drive all sorts of machinery – trucks, graders, rollers, bulldozers etc.

In July of 1966 (as the decimal currency system was newly introduced) I left my council job to open my delicatessen store called “Kirou’s Store” on Giblett Street which was next to Thompson’s Shell Garage and near the Manjimup Hotel. The business was very lucrative but once again required working

seven days a week with long hours. I would leave Ristana to look after the store whilst I travelled at least once and sometimes twice a week back and forth to Perth picking up supplies from the Perth Metropolitan Markets which were in the heart of the city at that time and other suppliers such as Kakulas Brothers. I had numerous tyre blow outs because the van was always overloaded and struggled with the excessive weight. The Toyota van started off as an open, flat bed utility which was modified in Perth into a totally waterproof enclosed van. It had a lockable back door but aerodynamically it was terrible. The van was difficult to control, and it tended to sway as it was constantly buffeted by wind. I also had numerous broken front windscreens, and every time that would happen you could bet it would rain. I can recall getting home late at night on several occasions drenched and freezing because of a shattered front windscreen that I had to remove in order to see where I was going. On another occasion, which just so happened to be the last trip to Perth, on the way home, I had a broken rear axle and the back wheel shot off in front of me. The van's rear was now scraping along the bitumen, and I had no rear brakes. I managed to somehow control the van enough to avoid a log truck coming the other way, ending up in a ditch with no major damage and lucky to be alive. Soon after that incident we sold the store.



Whilst we were still operating the shop, I got seriously ill. I went to see my GP on several occasions complaining of severe stomach pain but was sent home each time and told to rest and take medication for the pain. One morning after just seeing my doctor, I woke up in excruciating pain with bleeding because of a burst duodenal ulcer. My father-in-law took one look at me and said this is serious - we're going to Perth. We drove non-stop to see Dr Gligoroff who was a Perth doctor of Bulgarian background that many Macedonian patients visited because they could converse with him in Macedonian. When we got close to Perth, even though I was in severe pain and I was worried about blacking out, I had to drive the last few miles because my father-in-law was not confident driving in the city. We eventually arrived at Dr Gligoroff's practice. Once he saw me, he organised for me to be urgently seen by doctors at Royal Perth Hospital and told them that I would

need a blood transfusion and an operation. He was so upset with the misdiagnosis by the doctor in Manjimup that he made a phone call to him, and I could hear him yelling at the doctor and telling him that he shouldn't be practicing if he was incompetent.

I spent several weeks in hospital, and I knew things were serious because I was in intensive care for some time. I can clearly recollect the man in the bed next to me constantly asking the nurses and doctors how I was fairing, and they signalled that it wasn't looking good. I had a portion of my intestine removed and I was on soft mushed up food for quite some time. I put the ulcer down to stress and worry. I was always concerned about providing for my family and about my parents' welfare back in the village. I would always work hard to make enough money so I could regularly send funds to my parents and siblings back home. Since then, I've changed my outlook to life and decided worrying and stressing was not going to solve anything and what good would I be to my family if I was sick. Unlike before, now, when my head hits the pillow, I switch off and get quality sleep. Whilst I was in hospital, my father-in-law was kind enough to cover for me until I was well enough to resume.

My 12 years in Manjimup were difficult as I was newly married with a young family, and I worked hard to make a better life than that which I had left in the village. However, there were also many good times living in Manjimup as there was a very large Macedonian population and there would be regular picnics held at Fonty's Pool and dances organised in the town hall with traditional live music being performed in

Macedonian – something that was difficult to do back in the village. The boys had a great time growing up surrounded by relatives all around them. We lived on 50 Graphite Road and on number 48 lived my wife's sister, Petra with her two boys. On 52 Graphite Road lived my in-laws who proved invaluable as babysitters whilst we worked. On 54 Graphite Road lived my wife's other sister Lena with her husband Stase and their three boys. Three doors down on 60 Graphite Road lived my sister Kata and husband Giro with their young daughter and son. There were also relatives over the road and nearby in town as well as on farms out of town.



A photo taken in the late 50s of the house at 48 Graphite Road which was originally occupied by my in-laws and then later by Ristana's sister Petra and her family.

Photos from our wedding 15/09/1957.









From L-R: Me, Ristana, Petra Stoikova (Ioannou - Ristana's oldest sister), Teta Stojanka Koleva (Nicolaou), Sotir Stoikov at the front and Giro Stoikov at the rear during the tobacco days. Circa 1958.



Tending to tobacco plants - weeding and raking around the plants. Circa 1957.



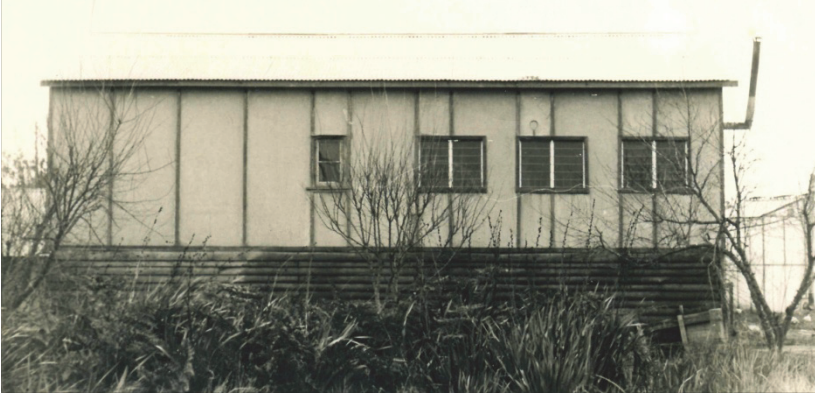
Me on the tractor with Lazo Kolev carrying a bale of tobacco leaves. Circa 1959.



From L-R: Me, Ristana, behind Ristana is Risto Kolev, Tetin Mitre Dimov (Dimovitis), Lazo Kolev, behind Lazo is Vasil Stoikov (Ioannou), Stojanka Koleva and Petra Stoikova. Circa 1959. The photo was taken between 48 and 50 Graphite Road on a strip of land that was a vehicle access route from the main road to the paddocks behind the houses. Vasil was tragically killed two years later in 1961 when he was knocked off his bicycle outside our house by a drink driver.



This is the house we first lived in after we got married in 1957. The house is on 52 Graphite Road with a Zepha 6 parked in the garage – our first car. To the right in the photo, you can see one of several sheds that had been built during the tobacco days. Not long after they were erected, they were dismantled. In their place, straight after the collapse of the tobacco industry we built a new house next door on 50 Graphite Road. This is where we stayed until our move to Perth. My in-laws moved to our old house 52 Graphite Road and Petra and Vasil with their three children moved into my father-in-law's house on 48 Graphite Road after roughing it in a makeshift shack that my father-in-law had constructed for them after they arrived in Australia in 1958. Petra was already married and initially remained in Turie when the move was made by my father-in-law to bring everyone to Australia.



A photo of the large tobacco shed which stood at 50 Graphite Road. It comprised of two levels. As can be seen in the photo, the lower level had gaps between the horizontal wooden slats. This allowed for air flow. The initial stage in the tobacco process was to have the newly picked leaves hooked onto tall wooden stakes that had long protruding metal spikes. The green leaves were firstly placed into wood-fired kilns that helped to hasten the drying process. This process would take about a week or so and required 24-hour monitoring to make sure the fire didn't go out and that the heat intensity was at the correct level.

The kilns were a short distance behind the building in the photo. Unfortunately, nobody thought to take a photo of the kilns as at the time they seemed insignificant. The partially dried leaves were then transferred to the lower section of the main tobacco building where they were placed out of the sun, and the cooler airflow could do its work in continuing the drying process. Once sufficiently dry, the leaves were taken to the upper level for grading and packing. The tobacco leaves had to retain some

degree of moisture and suppleness – if they were too brittle and flaky then they were considered too dry.

In the top level of the building, each leaf was painstakingly assessed for quality and then, with the aid of a press, packed into large bales. These bales were then marked with our details and made ready for shipment to the eastern states. I have, to this day, kept the metal template that was used to mark the bales as a lasting souvenir.



The metal template used to mark the bales of tobacco.



Our new house on 50 Graphite Road, circa 1961. This is the block where all my tobacco sheds once stood.



Our young family with children George and John. Circa 1965.



My sister Fania, husband Petre Kitin (Kitis) and young daughter Helen with Ristana, George and myself. The Kitin family regularly came down from Perth to visit us. Note the tobacco crop in the background. This photo was taken circa 1959.



Picnic at one of the farms not long after getting married. Circa 1957.



Picnic at Fonti's Pool. L-R Mara Eftova (Blakers), Vesa Novachkova (Engeleva), and Ristana. Circa 1958.

However, with the boys, George and John, growing up and the thought about them requiring tertiary education, together with the lack of work opportunities and inadequate medical facilities in Manjimup, on the 9th of August 1969 we shifted to Perth.

MY TIME IN PERTH

Just days after the US landing on the moon, we landed in Perth. We had no idea about the suburbs of Perth but had simply driven around a few weeks earlier and purchased a new house that had just been completed in Balga (now Westminster). We were at the edge of the urban sprawl at the time (10 kilometres from the city centre). There was pretty much nothing but bush between us and the next town, Wanneroo, which was a further 20 kilometres away. In the three years that we were in our store in Manjimup, we were able to save enough money to purchase our new home without needing to borrow money.



L-R John, Ristana and George at 22 Bilinga Road, Balga. Photo circa 1971.



Photo of me at 22 Bilinga Road, Balga. Photo circa 1975.

I managed to obtain a job at the Perth City Council soon after arriving in Perth. The skills that I had acquired at the Manjimup Shire Council proved invaluable and allowed me to progress to foreman in quick time. One day, a road was being built in Mount Hawthorn and it started raining and I huddled under a tree with the engineers. I asked them why they were spending so much money constructing the road the way that

they were. They asked me how I would do it. I explained to them my ideas and they asked how I knew all of this. I explained to them that I did this sort of work in Manjimup.

Soon after, I was promised more challenging work but, in the meanwhile, I had successfully applied to work as a fruit and vegetable manager for Coles. When I started working at Coles New World in Morley in 1972, there were only three Coles stores in Perth. By the time I had finished at Coles in 1978 there were 53 stores. When I was managing Coles Warwick, I won an Australia-wide certificate for the best manager based on profit from sales and presentation of stock. It was a close tussle between Warwick and the Darwin store. The Darwin store didn't sell nearly as much stock, but they had larger sales figures because the prices they were charging were much higher in comparison to those in Perth. I was awarded a trophy, certificate, and money for my achievement.



Being presented with my award by the Australia wide Manager of Coles.

In 1975 whilst we were still living in Balga, we purchased an investment property in Steyning Way that we rented out. We had nothing but problems with tenants. We didn't bother to go through an agent but instead managed the property ourselves. One particular family started to fall behind in their payments and decided to pay for their rent by using cheques which started to bounce. I had to continually go back and forth arguing with them in order to get paid the outstanding money. On one occasion, when I went to try and get payment, the tenant said to me, "I don't pay money to dings." I said to him "You must have something wrong with you because you aren't living in your own house but instead living in a ding's house." At the time when I was talking to the tenant, I was

leaning alongside my car with my head resting on the gutter moulding near the roof of the car. I got caught off guard and was struck in the face with the back of my head hitting the car. I can't recall exactly what happened, but know I was being choked and luckily the man's wife pulled him off me. The family packed up and were gone soon after. I sought legal advice but was told not to waste my money because these sorts of people are the kind that go from residence to residence and do not pay and even if they wanted to pay you, they can't because they simply do not have the money. Soon after, we sold the house because we were sick of continually painting and cleaning the filth left behind by the tenants.

In 1978 we moved from 22 Bilinga Road in Balga to our newly built double storey house on 44 Delage Way, Balcatta.



That same year, I decided to leave Coles and take on the role of managing the Macedonian Community Centre in North Perth. I was also one of the committee members. I only stayed in this role for a relatively short time. My son George was nearing the completion of his Diploma in Education after having earlier completed his Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of WA but was told that very few graduates would be offered work in the foreseeable future. As a result, I decided to quit my job with the Macedonian Community and instead go into business with Ristana and help George out by getting him to work with us. We purchased a fruit and vegetable shop in Osborne Park in 1980 and ironically a few months later, in early 1981, George was offered a mathematics teaching job at Scarborough Senior High School. We continued working in the shop for four more years with George helping on weekends.

After selling the shop in 1985, I also had stints at managing fruit and vegetable departments for Woolworths, Action, Claremont Fresh and finally Cucumber's Growers' Market in Bicton until my retirement in 1998. Well, I thought I had retired - but not for long. I was convinced by my Svato, Tanas Mechkarov (George's father-in-law), and my cousin, Mitre Marin, to do another stint at managing the Macedonian Club in North Perth as the club was starting to struggle financially and they wanted my assistance to help turn things around. I ended up in this role for a further ten years. In addition to my two stints at managing the Macedonian Club in North Perth I, together with Ristana, also did volunteer work helping with the cleaning of the Macedonian Orthodox Church of St Nikola.

After our beautifully built church was completed in 1996, my son John and I donated \$7,000 to have the honour and privilege of receiving the key to officially open the church door for the first time on 4th February 1996. That was a very special and happy day for our family. In 2013 in recognition of my services to the Macedonian community of Perth, I was awarded life membership.



The key that my son John and I were presented with in honour of being the first to officially open the church in 1996.



Our church in North Perth. My first cousin, Luba Nannov, was visiting from Melbourne in July of 2018 when this photo was taken. Luba is my Striko Petre Kirev's daughter.



In 1990, we decided to build another 2-storey house, this one in the suburb of Stirling. This is our current residence and we have been there for some 31 years. We sold our previous house to my son John who has since demolished and rebuilt on the same block. We enjoy spending our senior years outdoors tending to our vegetable garden and this is most probably where you will find us if you were to visit.



It has been a varied and fulfilled life that I have led. My life started 90 years ago in a war-torn land under oppressive conditions and later lead me to the sanctuary of Australia, which has given us freedom and opportunity. I missed out on

an education due to circumstances beyond my control, but I am proud of my achievements in life. I am also very proud of my two sons George and John and their families. I am content in knowing that they have received a good education with George being a high school teacher and John a pharmacist. I am also very proud of my grandchildren who have also done well academically. George's daughter Cassandra is also a teacher (music) and his son Michael is running his own IT business. John's daughter Nicole is a pharmacist, his daughter Amanda a primary school teacher, and his son Christian is nearing the completion of his Optometry Degree.



Tanas and Ristana Kirev.

The Life Story of Tanas Kirev is a 90 year autobiography of a Macedonian man born in the village of Neret in Aegean Macedonia. The story starts with his family and early life in the village, and moves to key events in the Second World War and the Greek Civil



War and their consequences. In search of a better life, the author migrated to Western Australia and found a full life with work, marriage, family and community. Although intended as a family record, the author is happy to share his experiences with those interested in Macedonian history and in a migration story of sanctuary, freedom and opportunity.

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