

Eugenia KOUSSIDIS

This is an interview by George Lewkowicz with Eugenia Koussidis, formerly known as Eva Koussidis. Eva worked for Don Dunstan in the 1970s as the Inquiry Officer. This interview is for the Don Dunstan Oral History Project and the date is 2nd November 2007 and the location is the Don Dunstan Foundation offices.

Eugenia, thanks very much for being happy to do this interview. Can you just, for the background information for this interview, just tell me a bit about yourself – a brief bio, if you like – how did you get to be trained in community welfare work and how did Don get to know about you?

I discovered the existence of social work when I was sitting for a compulsory test, exam, when I was at what was then called the intermediate high school. I'd been in Australia for five years then. I had no English when I arrived. But this was a compulsory test; I sat for it and did rather well and I went to see an Education Department psychologist who looked at my results and said that I shouldn't attempt tertiary education because my English would let me down; but she did mention that had I had good English I would have been a suitable candidate for social work, which was a profession I'd never heard of before that. So I ignored what she said about my English and she was in fact quite wrong because I went on to get a scholarship at that year and then again in matriculation and my best marks were for English. So I ignored that bit; but I took on her suggestion that social work was the area for me so I investigated that and got into the course I wanted and in the first year of that course I heard that there were agencies in Melbourne which were working with non-English-speaking migrants, who were then called 'New Australians'. There was nothing like it in Adelaide, so I approached the head of department and said, 'This is the area I want to move into. I want to do a placement there', so I went and did that, spent two months in the summer break working with people who were working with the local non-English-speaking communities and met some really wonderful people there who taught me very much.

So I got a taste for that, came back to Adelaide to finish my course and still not much here in terms of avenues for me to practise those kind of skills, so I wrote to the Australian Embassy in Canberra and said, 'I want to work with migrants. I can't get any experience here, but I do want to go and work in Greece because I want to know where these people come from so that I can kind of help them settle in here',

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so it was arranged that I would do a placement at the Australian Embassy and the understanding was that I would then come back and work for the Immigration Department. So I did that. I quite liked working in Greece, so I extended my time and then got myself a job working with the International Social Service which had an agency in Athens, and they worked with problems resulting from migration. They worked in English, French and Greek and I had English and Greek which was useful, so I worked there for several months.

I ended up spending over a year in Greece, came back here, felt obligated to approach the Immigration Department because that was the understanding, I would work for them; I went for an interview, obviously failed to impress them, haven't heard from them since; and so (laughs) I went to the Department for Community Welfare and got a job instantly, and went to work at the Woodville District Office.

I had a very good boss who allowed me to follow up an area that had not been covered properly, or the Department was only just really thinking about these other people, so she said to me, 'You've got to have a normal caseload but once you do that you do what you like', basically, she gave me a very free hand. So I started to do I guess what would now be called 'grass roots community work'. I went to areas like Brompton and Bowden where there was a high percentage of non-English-speaking people, and in those days Brompton and Bowden were not trendy and fashionable; they were poor, working-class areas. I would go to see a legitimate, official client, but quite quickly it started to become a bit of a hub for people to come. They'd recognise my car. I'd go and see a family and then other people down that street would see my car and they would come with their forms to be interpreted, with instructions on medication that they couldn't understand. One Turkish family had a baby, they had to put it on formula and they couldn't, they had no idea what a formula was and how to mix it and do that sort of stuff, and I only had Greek and English at that stage so really it wasn't because I was one of them; I was just somebody who could speak slowly and simply rather than simply loudly at them and I would find ways of communicating with them.

I was really touched at that point – this was at the point when there were the Cyprus problems, you know, Turkey had invaded Cyprus, and Greece and Turkey were just about coming to war, and one of the families that I was most welcomed at

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was a Turkish family. There were only about twenty of them at that stage in Adelaide and I was their only source of information about the political situation over there. They had family there and they were concerned, and I was very much touched by the kind of trust they had in me – a Greek, a mortal enemy because I made no bones about being a Greek and they knew that – and it put me in that position of having to be honest but sensitive and treat these people for what they were: very decent people. So it started to kind of create a community spirit and I was the focus of that. I was a government person working in the welfare department, but they would never have come to the office, and in a sense it's the chicken and the egg thing: why would people go to an agency if they don't expect a service from there? If you want to measure demand you provide a service, get it established, remove it and see what happens. So people started to come to the Community Welfare office because I was there, and they were people who would normally not go there – not because they were scared of governments, not because they didn't think they would be helped, but they didn't expect to get anything and there were no other people in that office who had any training or any language skills or any knowledge about culture to be able to deal with them. They would have treated them as straight welfare clients: 'Do you meet these criteria?' or 'Is your child having to be supervised by a court-imposed order?' and then you're within the net. Beyond that there wasn't anything else. But I think my boss was a very good woman and allowed me that kind of free rein, which meant I also started to get involved with the budding groups of volunteers, educated, first/second-generation, non-English-speaking people who were putting time and effort into creating a kind of a groundswell of community involvement amongst migrants, and that was very much the beginning of the ethnic radio thing as well.

I remember a lad who was doing it. He'd moved from a well-established, well-to-do suburb to live in Brompton to be part of that and he had started taping, on a normal tape machine, an hour of Greek music to present that through the community station – I think it might have been the University of Adelaide station, I can't remember – but it started with him; we now take it for granted, we've now got EBI.

That's right, yes.

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You try taking that away and see what happens. But at that point anybody could have said, 'Who wants Greek radio?' – or Italian or Serbian or Croatian or whatever. But it was a really exciting time and those were things that created energy and we were young and interested and I guess wanted to empower ourselves and our people to do that.

So we're looking at the early 1970s, late '60s here?

We're looking at the '70s. I came back from Greece end of '73.

End of '73.

Yes.

You mentioned the Community Welfare Department, was there any cultural awareness training at the time?

Not that I was aware of. I was only the second trained social worker that they employed. There was another woman a year or two older than me who finished a year or so ahead of me and she worked for that department as well, so I think there was this thought or plan to do something about this problem, but we were expected to do a normal caseload and do other stuff as well, as the need arose. But we were left pretty much to our own devices.

So there was some broad awareness of the needs of people from – – –.

There were, yes, and that included Aboriginal people because I remember when I was working at Woodville there was an 'Aboriginal aide'. She was an Aboriginal woman and she was there to work with the Aboriginal community, but she was not trained. Part of the problem is that people were not trained, and I think it's okay to start off with non-trained people but at the same time you've got to give them the opportunity to get some profession, otherwise you're just providing a second-class service because you wouldn't do that to the rest of the population.

When you were working with Greek people you spoke in Greek?

Absolutely.

And did the Department say, 'You have to be of a certain standard', or did they just accept that you spoke in Greek?

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No, they took my word for it. Many years later when I went back to that department after my time with Dunstan, many years later they were passing around a list of people with cultural and linguistic awareness. It was a very long list, but it included people on it – it went simply on people’s names, surnames, or tenuous connection. I remember there was a bloke on it who was married to a sub-continental person, he was married to a Nepali or an Indian; that was his connection to non-English – – –. He could not provide any service, as far as I know he had no language, he didn’t speak Hindi or Nepali or whatever; he was married to somebody. And I found that really offensive because if you looked at the several pages of these people with ‘cultural knowledge, language, awareness’, you could eliminate ninety-nine per cent of them as being next to useless, and for the rest of it they took your word for it – as we did with interpreting services at that stage. There weren’t really any, so if somebody says, ‘I can interpret’, they did; or somebody’s child had to go with them to the doctor and explain to their mother why her ovaries have to be removed, you know? That kind of standard, that it was always second-rate and it was always assumed that because you look foreign and you’ve got a foreign name somehow language and culture has osmosed and you can perform these tasks, and I find that really offensive.

Where did you train to be a social worker?

What was then the South Australian Institute of Technology.

And just to get on the record, which school did you go to, the high school?

I went to Parkside Primary School to start with because I lived in the area and it was not the trendy and fashionable suburb that it is today. I was there for two years. Because I didn’t speak English and I was eleven years old they put me down two grades with the slow class and I had a teacher who used to talk very loudly at me because she thought I’d understand. But I had a headmaster, bless him, and a neighbour, we knew one bloke, in our first years in Australia we knew one chap who was educated in Greece, was multilingual and had an office job as opposed to factory work. He’s the only person my family knew who wasn’t a brickie or a labourer. My father knew that I was actually quite bright – nobody told me this but he knew that – so he took this chap, who’s still a very close friend, and they went to

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see the headmaster and said, 'She doesn't belong in this class. She's better than that', and by the time I finished primary school I'd be fifteen, which would be too late to do anything. So the headmaster, bless him, said, 'If she does the work of her class and I'll see her and assess her she can move up, so she can move at her own rate.' So I did four years' worth of primary school in two and I came top of my class by the end of that – and thank goodness I did because I didn't know about high schools. My family didn't, you know, we came from a village, school population fifty; go to school with over a thousand students, I didn't know about zoning, I didn't know about technical high schools, Unley High. So I ended up at Unley High School instead of the nearer technical college because I did well. I had nothing to do with that decision, my parents had nothing to do with that decision, it was completely in the lap of the gods. So I went to a high school that didn't teach me shorthand and typing, they taught me other stuff, and picked up the language obviously very well and very quickly because I got a couple of national scholarships, and so by matriculation – Unley High School was great. It was very good. They were academically-inclined, they valued that, I had very good teachers and as I progressed in high school and my language skills became better I had a couple of excellent teachers who mentored and encouraged and helped me to achieve my best.

And were there other young Greek girls there at the time?

There were. There were three of us in my kind of era, three Greeks who maintained a decent reputation for the Greeks, and the others were all considered ratbags. (laughter) I think a lot of them fell through the net because ---. I was exceptionally lucky that I had those little things happen in my life early on so that I could go on and be educated, otherwise at the age of fifteen finishing primary school you don't go into high school, that was just the reality. A lot of other children didn't have my luck or my drive or my whatever and so they suffered and they weren't encouraged, they weren't allowed to be academically excellent, so they ended up unskilled or in trades. Because I know in the class that I was first in, there were Greek kids who came at same time, they picked up schoolyard, skipping-rope songs and things really easily because they were more sociable than I was; I was doing my

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homework the way I knew how to because nobody helped me. I had one teacher and I remember the woman, by my second year I said to her, 'Can you give me ---?' School used to finish at quarter to four, I think, and I said, 'Can you give me fifteen minutes at the end of the lesson to help me with things?' And she said, 'No,' she said, 'haven't got time.' 'Because', I said, 'if I finish this I can go on to the next year.' And she said, 'No, I haven't got time. Anyway, you're not going anywhere.' Fifteen minutes a week I asked of this woman! So going on my experiences, other children who didn't have my drive, my bloody-mindedness, my whatever it was, would never have done that, and so I think a lot of Greek-speaking kids whose main language or whose primary language was Greek or who were born in Greece and hadn't been here long enough, superficially they had English but really they lacked a lot of other knowledge, I think a lot of them were disadvantaged by that kind of system.

Just moving beyond those years and when you went to work, what was the sort of feel you had about the late '60s and '70s, if you can recall them, about your situation as a Greek person and multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism wasn't even thought of (laughs) then. I think we lived quite separate lives. There was active racism; I didn't experience it myself but I know that 'wog' and 'dago' were normal kinds of expletives used to refer to people. I've often thought that 'New Australian' – because that's what we were called then, when we weren't being sworn at – 'New Australian' was a wonderful term, it really said it all. It said, 'We're all Australian, some of us are newer.' But because of bigotry and racism the term becomes an offensive term, so what we do as a society is quite stupid, really: we change the name. We don't do anything about changing the attitude. So we kind of come up with a new name as if that gets rid of the problems that caused the old name to become an insult. I've always regretted the loss of 'New Australian' because I think that's very much at the crux of it; so we end up with acronyms. But, you know, as far as I'm concerned, in all those years we were just 'bloody wogs'.

Yes. Sort of 'ethnics' or or something now.

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Yes, that's right. 'Ethnics'. You know, people who don't even know the root of that word.

That's right, yes.

It's a Greek word and doesn't mean that at all, but it's become again a defining term with negative overtones.

Yes. Well, we'll move into your appointment in the Premier's Department. On 20 February 1976 Don Dunstan announced that you'd been appointed as the Greek-speaking officer to his staff to assist him on matters affected the Greek community, and that was you. You've told me that actually you started in the job on 10 November 1975, but probably because of the hoo-ha following 11 November 1975 dismissal of the Whitlam Government your appointment and announcement might have been just set aside for a while. If you don't mind, I'll just read the statement of your appointment because it gives some background to the rationale.

The Premier, Mr Don Dunstan, has appointed a Greek-speaking officer to his staff to assist him on matters affecting the Greek community.

Ms Eva Koussidis, a professional social worker, was appointed late last year. Ms Koussidis has a diploma in social work and has worked for both State and Federal Government departments including the Australian Embassy in Athens and the South Australian Department [for] Community Welfare.

Don Dunstan said, 'I'm very pleased to welcome Ms Koussidis to my staff. The Government has always been very concerned to ensure that the problems and needs of migrants in South Australia are given special attention: we have appointed interpreters and advisers to various government departments. Ms Koussidis's appointment will be of great assistance to the Government because she will directly help many families and individuals with problems and from this she'll be able to advise me of the matters which are worrying the Greek community. In particular, Ms Koussidis will be working closely with the Greek community in South Australian country towns. Ms Koussidis has already visited Renmark, Berri, Loxton and other Riverland towns and will shortly visit Port Pirie and Port Lincoln.

And then the address was the Premier's Department, 11th Floor, State Administration Centre, Victoria Square. So that's quite a good lead-in to what Don was expecting of you. How did you get to be asked to join Don's staff, because this is quite a jump into – I think it was, was it into his Inquiry Unit, or was it a separate – –?

Into his Inquiry Unit, and Al Grassby told me later – because he knew these things – I was the first person in Australia to be specifically employed as an ethnic anything

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by any government. Private industry had been doing it for years because they do, because that's where the money is, but I was the first person to have done this, I was included in the Inquiry Unit. I haven't a clue how they came to hear of me. These days you'd say that I was 'head-hunted'; the term didn't exist then. I think in retrospect when I thought about it – the position was not advertised; I was approached by Stephen Wright who was Don's private secretary at that stage and I think they were considering a number of people but the Greek community was very clearly divided and had been for many years at that stage so Don was always doing a juggling act and people were very much aligned with one side or the other, and the people who were important, significant, powerful leaders in their community, whatever, were partisan. Don, I think, always tried to keep a very even-handed approach and there was a different emphasis in the two sides: one was much more politically active and socially active, cultural functions and stuff; the other one was much more welfare-based and church, faith kind of stuff. I think Don was looking for somebody who was going to be at least acceptable to both sides and I didn't come with any baggage and I think I was acceptable. He was also looking for, I think, young blood and that was something that was noticeable about his years in power, that he didn't hold youth against you; he was looking for energy and new ideas. The other people I gather later who were considered for the position were all males and they were all forty-plus, I think I put a few noses out of joint.

I think also I was making a bit of a name myself down Woodville way because I was very obvious. There weren't many social workers around; there certainly weren't any young women with a mouth on them like I was, and so I started to create a bit of an impact and I think they heard of me, ran my name past important Greek people who didn't object and so I was there.

Fair enough. And did you get to meet Don personally in the lead-up?

Yes, I did, yes. It was a lunch, we just sort of chatted. There was no interview as such. I'd spoken to Stephen before that. So they went on my record, whatever that happened to be, so I met Don and then I got a call from Steve that 'You've got the job, can you start?'

Right, good. And where was the lunch, can you remember?

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No. No, I was too – – –. (laughter) Look, George, I had no connections politically, I wasn't a member of the Labor Party, I didn't know any politicians. This was not my world, and having lunch with Don Dunstan, I remember the lunch but I don't remember what it was.

And can you remember what he might have spoken to you about and why you took the job?

I took the job because it was offered and I was really flattered. I was also extremely excited. He didn't talk to me then about the job, that was just a social lunch to see whether I could actually manage, I suppose. But once I started then I spent time with him, he talked with me and said he basically wanted me to have a free hand to do what I was doing. He gave me a standing weekly appointment with him so that any matters that arose from my work I could go and see him personally, which I thought was just wonderful.

How long was the meeting?

A good quarter hour.

Good quarter-hour? Right, that's interesting.

Sometimes I didn't need the time; there were other times when I did. Once I was sitting in my office, which was on that floor, with a client, a Greek client, and the Premier just walked in. Kind of looked a bit vague, opened the door and said, 'Could you do something with this?' He could have gotten his secretary to buzz me – anybody else would have – but it was quicker and easier for him to just walk around the lifts and come into my office. My client just about fell off the chair, (laughter) the Premier coming to me to give me something. I mean, he was an amazing man but a sensible, practical man, so once he made a decision that I could do the job he basically said, 'Go find out what people need and come and tell me if there's something I need to do.'

And when you're having your debriefs and whatever else, what were the sort of issues that you were talking about and he was talking about?

In the press release it mentioned that I'd been to the Riverland. I went up there and spent maybe a week up there and talked to lots of people and made lots of notes. It

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was to do with problems in the citrus industry and a lot of Greek people up there were involved in that, so I knew nothing about citrus, I knew nothing about export, I knew nothing about the Riverland, but that's what you do, you come with a clean kind of slate. I spent time up there, came back and wrote a report for him which he read and said to me in the lift, 'That was good,' he said, passed it on to Brian Chatterton, who was the Minister of Agriculture at that stage, and as a result of that the Riverland people got several million dollars' worth of subsidy. Well, they thought I was wonderful, didn't they, (laughter) as they would, because it wasn't just the subsidy, they saw it as a direct result of my visit and it was, so they actually attributed more power to me than I had; but it was my time up there and I must have done a pretty good job of it. But then every time somebody from the Riverland came they'd bring down two bags of oranges or whatever and I'd be invited there for social functions and people with individual problems – not personal, but individual problems – would come down to see me. I had one of those blokes came down because his insurance company – he had property in Adelaide – insurance company wouldn't pay out because they said he hadn't reported the theft or whatever. So I chased it down and I went down to the local police station, because he said he had, and said to the people down there, 'Look, I know you haven't got time to do this, but is it okay if I go through your records for those dates?' And I found it and I got onto the insurance company and said, 'Such-and-such a date a report was made.' They paid him, and the bloke from the insurance company rang me back and said, 'If you're ever out of a job can you come and work for us? Because we should have done that.' You know?

Right, good, yes. And how long were you in the position for?

Four years.

Four years. And what were some of the key issues coming up fairly regularly that you can recall?

Unfairness in the employment sector. People were being treated appallingly, particularly people who'd had compensation cases, like workers' compensation, people who'd been injured at work and then were put on light duties: they were treated appallingly and I had a number of those. There were a range of individual

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problems that people came to see me – not so much because I worked for the Premier but because people feel that if you are talking to somebody close to the Premier you'll get a better service simply because. Some of that happened because I had the power, I suppose, simply by saying 'I'm from the Premier's office' to do things. But people were coming to me with individual problems that they couldn't get sorted anywhere else, and so often that was an indicator of a bigger problem and I think workers' comp was very much one of them.

Discrimination in all areas of life was another one and language, lack of interpreting and translating services, was clearly something that meant a whole range of services were not available to a substantial part of the population. I think that was Don's position, that no government service should be denied to people simply on the ground that they lack the language. So it was important that then – – –. This was happening, people were employed in various government departments, but we didn't have an accepted interpreting, translating – we didn't have a course at that stage; it was set up in that time and I had some involvement with that committee. People were interpreters because they said they were interpreters. There were people working in the courts who had lots of experience and may well have been very good and they were, some of them were, but there wasn't a standard so the Interpreting and Translating course was set up at what was then the Adelaide College of Arts and Education, I think, or Teachers' College, I don't remember, and so people who were already working in the field were expected to acquire a formal qualification and newer ones were coming through. So that meant that for the first time there were adequately-trained people who could be employed because of a proven language skill rather than somebody who had a foreign name and said, 'Yes, I speak Serbian' or whatever.

And say after about a year or two did you and Don come up with ideas about how to develop policy and legislation and improve things more generally?

I think that it was clear that the Inquiry Unit was not a policy-making body. We were dealing with people who wanted to see the Premier about a whole range of issues, some of which were personal – many of them were individual problems rather than personal – so I think that was where it became necessary to establish a separate department that looked at creating policy that covered as many of the non-

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English-speaking groups as possible. Although I had cultural awareness, I only had two languages at that stage so I could be of limited use. I did see Poles and I did see Slavs but if they didn't have English, we were fairly stumped.

So if there was a sort of pattern coming up that'd get bounced over to, what was it, the Ethnic Affairs Branch at the time?

That's right, yes, yes. The individual cases were still coming through and sometimes if they were indicative of an issue, I would pass it on to the appropriate minister. So I would often pass something on to the Attorney-General's Department. I had a chap who came in with a racist note from his employer, who happened to be a JP,¹ so I thought the Attorney-General's Department should know about the kind of people that they approve as JPs; or matters that had to do with women's discrimination, discrimination on the grounds of gender. Mary Beasley was then the Commissioner of Equal Opportunities here –

That's correct, yes.

– she was the first one, I think – and I had a bit to do with her staff because any matters that were in that area I would do what I did and then pass them on for them to then incorporate in their work.

And did Don ever talk about his own electorate and the people in his electorate, the sort of issues they were bringing up?

My day job was at the Premier's office, but when you're twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six you can work twenty hours a day and it was a huge buzz. On weekends, I would – and some Saturday mornings I'd go to his electoral office because there were a lot of Greeks in Norwood who wanted to see him at his electoral office, as was their right, so if there was a language issue I would go and do that. I also got involved in political campaigns – again, evenings and weekends because that's when those things happen anyway. Greeks are very political people and there were a fair number of them in Norwood. And I think that was also the time we started actually putting out literature for political purposes, obviously, but in languages other than English. It was very new then and very exciting and much appreciated by

¹ JP – justice of the peace.

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people because – we’re talking thirty years plus here – there were people who were politically aware and committed but English was not a language that was very familiar to them so I would translate electoral materials. I went through the electoral rolls and picked out the Greek names and sent them, which was the right thing to do then; they’re still doing it now but it’s now a bit offensive sometimes because we’re talking about two generations further on. There are very few Greeks in Australia now who are voters who don’t have English, so getting a letter – I get letters in Greek, which is fine but I –

Because of your name on the roll, yes.

– yes, that’s right.

I don’t get any Polish ones yet.

(laughter) The Poles aren’t that organised.

No, don’t seem to be. And what did the Greek people think of Don, did they just see him as a politician or was it something else?

As far as they were concerned, he was one of them. He was a great guy and they would have done anything for him and they loved him to death.

Why was that?

Well, he was a middle-class, educated, erudite person who talked and spent time with everybody. Never, ever, ever made a class distinction in his life. Valued what they had and valued it highly, took part in their celebrations, was always approachable, he learnt to do Greek dancing, he had Greek friends in his personal circle, he was seen with them, he took trouble with them. And he was a political person; Greeks are very political. Why wouldn’t they love him?

Can you remember what he talked to them about, was it the Greek classics or the –

No.

– politics?

No. They just loved him and it was, ‘How are you, Don?’ and ‘Good luck’ and ‘We’ll help you’ and ‘What can we do?’ You know, the Greek migrants of that era

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were not people who were educated in their own language. He knew more about Greek classics than they did, of course he did, he was an educated man, that's what educated people had in his age group. So it wasn't that they could discuss *Antigone* in detail, but they saw him as a down-to-earth person who did not discriminate against them, who liked them, who ate their food, who came to their children's weddings, who got up and danced a Greek dance and who appointed somebody for them who spoke their language and they had access to him and I think those things count for a great deal.

Who were some of the key people that you saw him relate to? You mentioned, I don't know, was the leadership – you mentioned the split in the community.

Yes. I think there were and he was very even-handed in his treatment of the Greek community. He tried very hard to be that, to be fair, to the point where there was a magistrate appointed from one side of the divide – it was Nick Manos – and so there was another magistrate appointed who was identified, John Kiosoglous. He was the legal adviser to the Archdiocese, Nick Manos was the President of the Greek Community in Franklin Street. They were good men and good mates and they didn't take knives to each other, but you know – – –. (laughter) And they would have been very fair and would have given fair answers and fair advice; but Don did have to sort of juggle a bit.

Very good. Well, you mentioned he was very active in the community and – just going back to your work with people coming in for your help and, beyond that, you've mentioned how you went about helping them a bit and referring matters over to the other departments – say firstly in the Inquiry Unit itself, did you relate to the other people in there or were you pretty sole sort of operator working with the others?

There were two men there. Jack Richards, he was an older chap and at that stage he was still the Mayor of Norwood, and he had been working in Don's electoral office in Norwood – I'm not certain of this but I think that's where he came from. He was not trained in anything but he knew the political arena and he had lots of contacts, the kind of networking that a fifty–sixty-year-old bloke who's been a mayor of a city would have, so he worked in that way. And there was another chap, Fred Hansford, don't know where he came from – reliable, stodgy, untrained, heart in the right place, loyal, all that sort of stuff. But I think Don wanted a professional

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standard set and so I came in and I was female and thirty years younger than them so I was getting a different sort of clientele and mostly non-Anglos, which was different for that place and awkward for them, it's like I'd walked into a cathedral. There was one bloke who came to see me and I was seeing him down and it was lunchtime and we were going down in the lift, the eleventh floor, and Hudson, the Minister of Education was in the lift and a couple of other – Geoff Virgo – and I'm jabbering away in Greek to this bloke and we get out of the lift and he was whispering to me, he said, 'You talk like that in front of them?' He meant, 'Do you talk in Greek in front of them, not whispering', like it's a shameful thing. And that's really significant, that people thought that they couldn't speak their language in public. Obviously. And he was stunned that I would be chattering away in Greek in a lift with a couple of ministers.

Amazing, yes. And what about when you went to the other departments? You mentioned you referred matters to say the Attorney's, but did you have links with Community Welfare again and any other departments about getting services to people?

Yes, I dealt with any department that was involved, and because I would ring – rather than write a ministerial, which I think just causes a lot of work for a lot of people and then it gets to the person who caused the problem in the first place and they answer it, waste of everybody's time – instead of doing that, I would ring. And you ring and say, 'I'm So-and-so from the Premier's office', it does have an effect so you get to talk to somebody who has the capacity and ability to do something. It avoided a lot of paperwork and it actually got things done that wouldn't have been done. So I didn't have any problems. Didn't have any problems with private industry, either, because I had a few of those to do, and they behaved pretty well and I think a lot of that was to do with the fact Premier's office, not Department for Community Welfare. If I were in the Department for Community Welfare I couldn't possibly ring up the head office of a major manufacturing firm in Melbourne and tell them, 'You've underpaid this bloke.' I would have had to talk to my boss who would say, 'It's not our business.' So there was quite a lot of power in that position to achieve things for individual people and of course that creates a kind of domino effect because one bloke gets eight thousand dollars that he wasn't going

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to get and he tells his mates and then they tell their neighbours and so if they've got a problem they come to me, so it was very much in many instances people coming to see me, the individual, rather than going to see Dunstan.

Yes. And did you keep in contact with people in Community Welfare –

Oh, yes, yes.

– and sort of swap notes and professional development-type activities?

Yes, we also, because this was a time when there was this kind of move towards providing services for non-English-speaking people, there were a lot of meetings and seminars and committees and I was involved in those, it was a seven-day-a-week job which I just loved doing, but that's what we did, and so Community Welfare and Immigration Department, who got a lot of flak from us – 'us' meaning us non-Anglos working in this area – we were constantly at those sorts of things. There was a bilingual conference in Melbourne, first one I've ever been to – first one ever was, I think, to actually have a conference where everything had to be repeated in Greek, and I was I think one of the few people who could write in both languages so I ended up taking minutes. But the thought that you couldn't actually just have this in English and have people just sort of manage, that was a pretty amazing thing. So I maintained contacts with people in departments who were interested and involved in the same things because we saw each other at seminars. You know, there was the Women's Information Switchboard that was very important; Working Women's Centre.

Immigration Department were employing people who were from other cultures but I guess what they were doing was dealing with people who had business with Immigration Department. In the early years there was an honorary Greek Consul; we now have a professional consulate team, but then it was a Greek-born lawyer who put a lot of time – Vasili. Apostol – he was the Consul, people used to go to him for not only consular matters but they used to go to him with things that needed witnessing or translating or whatever. He wasn't paid for that. I presume he was being paid expenses of some sort but he wasn't paid for that. He could have made a hell of a lot more money working those hours as a lawyer.

Can we just get his spelling for the record?

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Apostol, A-P-O-S-T-O-L.

Right, thank you. Was that a federally-sponsored meeting you went to Melbourne or was it Victoria?

No, it was a community meeting that a whole bunch of Greeks in Melbourne did. They were way ahead of us in those things and there were some people there – I can remember it was already well-known that a couple of doctors of Greek background had done health studies on Australian Greeks and Greek Greeks to see how they fared and stuff, so there was attention being paid to a range of different matters that had to do with being a non-Anglo here.

And how did you relate to the Greek community groups? There were the two major ones, but there's also the Greeks of Egypt and possibly others.

One hundred and twenty-three brotherhoods there were, yes.

The, all round there.

Yes, the Kazzies[Kastelorizians]. A hundred and twenty-three groups I counted. I was invited to their functions. I became a very well-known Greek. Because it was the highest-profile position in the Greek community, it was really easy. And, you know, we're a cohesive community. There were fifty thousand Greeks around at the time; I knew most of them and they knew me so I would go to functions, often accompanied Don if he was going to something, but usually I was invited in my own right which I was very appreciative of and grateful because it was a measure of the esteem that people held me in and I very much enjoyed that. I ended up – the troubles of Cyprus were happening at that stage and the High Commissioner of Cyprus came here for a visit and I went to meetings with him on Don's behalf because Don was doing something else – and I ended up getting involved with the Cypriot Community and became head of the Justice for Cyprus Committee. At that point I was the only female head of any Greek organisation that wasn't a ladies' auxiliary. I was twenty-six or something. And so I have the Cypriots backing me to this day, they know me and I'm attached to them and they are to me.

Terrific.

Because people are generous in their support and appreciation.

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In this and in your work was there any difference between how the women related to you and how the men related to you?

No. No. I think for a community that's allegedly patriarchal – and in many ways it is, and so's the Anglo–Australian one, people don't recognise it – it's a bit like a class thing; I think there are ways of overcoming whatever those barriers are and I behaved like a man. Looked like a woman but I did what – you know, people will give you respect if you do the right thing, and I did the right thing. So nobody thought of me as 'little girl' or 'little woman' and belonging in the kitchen somewhere because I wasn't doing things that belonged in the kitchen and I was getting results and they – the men, because I dealt mostly with men, actually, because they were the leaders of their brotherhoods and their associations in the communities – never once got a whiff that, 'Oh, it's only a woman.'

And do you know if you inspired other women to not necessarily follow in your footsteps but get involved as leaders and trained social workers and things like that?

I don't know, I don't know. I think it was inspiring for both genders, the mere fact that somebody, a first-generation migrant because that's what I am, could do that in a relatively short time.

And did you know George Giannopoulos[?], he was head of the Ethnic Affairs.

He wasn't, actually –

Oh, right.

– he was second-in-command; Alex Gardini was – – –.

Was the head.

Yes. They were both academics. I knew George, I knew him socially a bit because he was a teacher before that and then ended up tutoring at the Institute of Technology, tutoring in Social Work or whatever, and Alex was in the same institution and they came over to head the Ethnic Affairs Department.

Did you use to have any meetings with them?

Not really, not really. I mean, we didn't overlap a lot because they then had a department and their remit was to work with policy covering a whole lot of other

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areas so my role was still very much in Don's department; and I obviously would refer things to them and we would go to the same conferences and meetings, there was no animosity or competition because our roles were quite different.

Just a couple of very broad questions to top up the interview this morning: when you're looking at Don and observing how he did his work, how do you think he got not only the Greek community on-side but also the wider South Australian community, because some of the things he was doing might have seemed a bit radical at the time, might not have been radical to some of us but the broader community they'd be wondering about what he was up to.

I think if you do the right thing and you are seen to do that, then you're given a fair bit of leeway to do some other things. So if you engender people's trust and faith and goodwill then they'll give you a bit of rope and I think he did that. He did the right thing for many years. He persevered, he was a very decent bloke, he genuinely cared about people, he genuinely thought of them as worthwhile human beings, he didn't think of himself as superior – even though he clearly was; he didn't think that that gave him more right to things than anybody else, he genuinely believed in people's equality. I think those things were recognised so when he came up with something that seemed a bit off the planet people were more willing to kind of go with it, and I think that was something that he had that many, many politicians lack.

Did you ever see him work with people in the sense of they'd come in with a position and he'd changed their minds?

Oh, he was very persuasive.

Yes, right.

He was very [knowledgeable]. He was a very shy man, which is odd, really. He couldn't make small talk unless he was with intimates, joking and bantering, whatever; but give him an issue and he could talk about anything, so he was really in his element if somebody had an idea. He could take it on and he could pull it apart and he could talk about it, so he was very good, I mean intellectually he was very, very bright.

What about people who'd come in all fired up and angry about something, how did he relate to them, or did they generally calm down?

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I came across one situation once where we were just walking away from some festival at Norwood and this couple of young blokes came up and just abused him. I froze; he just ignored it and walked on. I didn't know what to say. I just couldn't believe that people could do that, to go and abuse – he was the Premier then – go and abuse the Premier for no reason at all. That's not about having a difference in political opinion, that's just yobbyish. But he completely ignored it – didn't ruin his dinner, didn't apparently do anything. I've not seen him in confrontations with angry people –

In meetings, right, okay.

– so I haven't seen that.

And just thinking about your time in the Premier's Department and the Unit, what do you think the major achievements were over that time in relation to – I'll call them 'people from non-English-speaking background'?

I think a recognition or an acknowledgment that they deserve to be treated as the same as other Australians in terms of their access to services, and that their cultures should be valued rather than denied.

And were there any areas you wished some more things had happened on?

I think that was probably quite a lot happening then. You know, things need to consolidate. I wish things were happening *now* – – –.

Right, yes. (laughter) Do you want to talk about that a bit?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I think things – you can't have change constantly; I think there needs to be a period of consolidation, and that's fine. But going backwards isn't acceptable, this is not the kind of Australia that we would have, should have had, this is not the kind of Australia that we were looking forward to, this is just appalling.

What things in particular?

Bigotry and racism, the fact that we treat refugees the way we do, the fact that nobody even notices with the kind of active racism we have on behalf of governments – and I'm talking about both State and Labor. There was an article in the paper a few weeks ago, page seventeen or something, about the number of New

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Zealand migrants and British migrants and Indian migrants who had come to Australia in that particular year – last year or the year before, whatever – and the figures were twenty-three thousand something for Brits and almost an identical figure for New Zealanders and one thousand, three hundred and something for Indians. There were no letters to the editor, nobody made a fuss about it, as far as I know nobody said anything. So if you're a New Zealander you just hop on a plane and come, you don't have to ask anybody's permission, nobody does a police check, you don't have a visa, you don't need one, you don't need a passport; you just come. If you're British we go and ask you to come, please, because our Premier goes to Britain and recruits police officers and nurses and teachers and whatever, so they can have twenty thousand people come. Now, as far as I know most Indians speak English so language isn't a problem for them in terms of fitting in, but we get one thousand, three hundred and something compared to the twenty-three thousand. Now, that to me is racism.

That's no different from what Calwell was saying many years ago – Arthur Calwell? He was famous for getting his chin shot, but I think the second thing he was famous for was that he said, 'For every European migrant we have we want ten Britons', and that's exactly what we're doing now. At least he was open about it, and that was the thinking of the time and it was acceptable to be racist, really. Now we say it's not acceptable but in fact, our actions show that it is more than acceptable, we're still doing that.

Yes. And what sense have you got of the Greek community these days in what they've gone through, the cycle of being down –

The bottom of the heap?

– on the bottom of the heap but now they're looked on doctors and developers and you name it.

Yes, what amazes me is the idiots, the kind of people who make policy and decide on citizenship tests, really haven't a clue about what makes successful migrants, they haven't the foggiest, and I think that's inexcusable because we've now had large-scale migration long enough to have third and fourth generation. We should be looking at what makes a successful migrant and you've just said we've now got

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doctors and lawyers, we've had them for a couple of generations among some communities; you can't possibly expect a thirty-year-old person who's grown up in another part of the world in a completely different society to come here and become an Anglo-Celt. Even if they were allowed to be – and they're not, I'm telling you – they're never going to be treated as anything other than a foreigner. They cannot shed their being. You look to the next generation. Those people, that first generation, are going to work hard to put a roof over their children's head, to give them an education, to get a job, to put food on the table. That's what they're going to do. The next generation are going to be your real citizens. They're the ones with roots here, they're the ones that don't have that three thousand-year-old background, who aren't going to have any problem being an Aussie if only you'd let them; but you won't, because if you've got a foreign name and you don't look like this mythical Anglo-Celt creature, you're never, ever going to be an Aussie.

I've been here for forty-five years; not once have I ever been mistaken for an Australian. So I'm not, I'm a Greek. I became a citizen first chance I got – or my family did. The only time I'm Australian is when I'm overseas. Now, I don't have a problem with that but I can't write to the papers complaining about some racist thing because my name is a 'foreign' name and some redneck is going to write back and say, 'Why don't you go back to where you came from?' because that's what happens.

Well, I've covered the areas I was wanting to work through and you had some notice of that. Was there anything you think you'd like to add to our interview today, any impressions about Don or things that we haven't covered?

I just think he would have been very disappointed with the kind of Australia we have allowed to be created that treats people like the enemy, that treats people like they're foreigners, that excludes people from access to a life that we all deserve, the kind of standard we all deserve. I think he would have been very disappointed.

All right. Well, thanks very much, Eugenia. I much appreciate and it's good to catch up again.

Nice to see you, George.

Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW.