

George GIANNOUPOULOS

PART I

This is an interview for the Don Dunstan History Project. It's George Lewkowicz the interviewer, interviewing Mr George Giannopoulos. George was involved in the early days of the Ethnic Affairs Branch. The date today is 18th July 2007.

George, thanks very much for getting involved and supporting the Don Dunstan History Project. Firstly, can you just give us, for the project, background on yourself, your family arrival in Australia and some of your early history, education and later on your work experience? Over to you.

Yes. I'm very pleased to be able to assist in this because I suppose what I'm going to talk about is a family's experience in coming to Australia and it really can apply to many families that came out. I suppose in a way one can use that as a basis to look at history at a particular time but in Australia's migration experience.

Many Greeks and Italians at the time after the Second World War wanted to primarily migrate because of economic reasons. A lot of them weren't actually refugees; the refugees were really more of the other countries that were within what we call the Eastern Bloc. However, the majority of Greeks and Italians that came out after 1945 were economic migrants and I think we need to make a distinction between the economic migrant and the refugee. Whereas the 'refugee' applied in a different way and really had nowhere to go, where the 'economic migrant' was consciously being attracted to Australia by the publicity of Australia – and Canada – to increase the population of Australia, because there was a policy at the time. Arthur Calwell was the Minister, who wanted to reach a target of two per cent and increase the population of Australia because the population of the time was about six or seven million or thereabouts. So after the War there was a conscious effort for that to occur.

In that context of post-war migration, our family experience – my father, my mother, my brother and myself and my sister – can be seen as examples of what happened to many other people, especially from Greece and Italy, that were economic migrants, because the refugees had a different experience. So I'm going to briefly talk about why and what were the motives for people coming here.

The primary motive is really for economic reasons. That means they wanted to have better education for their children, they wanted to look for a better future for

George GIANNOUPOULOS

themselves, they wanted to have opportunities; and when they looked around they could apply to Canada, they could apply to America or they could apply to Australia. Australia in fact had a very proactive program and because it had a need for labour, was advertising and promoting, through their different departments throughout Europe, to try and attract as many migrants as they could. In fact, they attracted more English migrants. Thus you get Elizabeth out north of Adelaide, which was established just after the War.

In our experience what happened was that my father said, 'Well, where is it possible for us to go?' America was closed because America's migration experience was from the 1880s to the 1930s. The aspect of the American experience was that America accepted about forty million or more people. That means America between say the 1870's to the 1930's, had this vast boost of population. It didn't actually require any more people and thus it wasn't really all that easy to enter America. So America was really not an option for our family.

The options were Canada and Australia, and my father said, 'Oh, well, Canada is pretty cold, I don't think we'll go to Canada', 'We'll go to Australia.' When he actually mentioned it to the rest of our relatives they said, 'You're absolutely bloody crazy. Why do you want to go to Australia? Do you realise they've got these massive rats that run up and down the main street, they've got boa constrictors and snakes that'll eat you up,' they were thinking more of the African tropics; they had no knowledge of Adelaide, Melbourne or Sydney – they had no concept. Consequently my father didn't actually take a lot of notice of them and simply he felt that they were exaggerating about the problems and the issues. He was a realist in the sense that he thought, 'Well, it can't get very much worse than this.' Europe was devastated, the Greek economy was devastated, what's he going to do? There was nothing much he could do to make a life in Greece. No relative was being supportive and saying, 'Why don't you go? It's a wonderful thing'; everyone was saying, 'You're absolutely crazy to go.' It took a certain kind of individual to actually have what I call the guts and the determination, and the intelligence to try to look through the fiction and get to the facts. He actually made enquiries about Australia. He said 'Well, okay, on the balance of probabilities, it's going to be a lot

George GIANNOUPOULOS

better than Europe.’

What part of Greece was the family from?

The family is from Kalamata. You know all those olives, they call ‘Kalamata olives’? We are the official Kalamata olive police people, we know what a Kalamata olive is.

One needs to understand that Kalamata at that time was a city devastated by World War 2. The Australian people today have learned new ways. They dip their bread in oil and eat Kalamata olives and Greek cheese. The new wave of food and culture and learning didn’t actually come until many, many years later in Australia.

We came from a region in the south that was economically devastated, because of the Second World War and then the Civil War. Consequently there was an enormous amount of push for people to think about other possibilities, and where others might have gone as guest workers to Germany or would have gone to other parts of Europe, my father decided at the time that he was going to come to Australia.

To apply to migrate to Australia, you could only have two children and so consequently the third child, which was my sister, was left behind with my uncles, my mother’s brother. In those days Greek culture allowed adoption of a child from another family. For example, one family might have four children and allow one of the children to be adopted, if the other family couldn’t have a child. Nowadays we have *in vitro* fertilisation. One of the children would in fact be left behind. That was only a temporary arrangement in our case though because he wanted his application to succeed. He applied with two children and that qualified him to be considered for immigration.

Then of course there were all kinds of medical checks. My sister stayed in Greece. Immigration was checking that you didn’t have tuberculosis and you weren’t crook or sick or whatever, because what Australia was actually after was healthy families that could work on the railways or work somewhere in labouring jobs such as in the Snowy Mountain Scheme. My father was contracted to work for

George GIANNOUPOULOS

the railways. So he was told, 'Look, when you get there there's going to be work, and why don't you apply?' The first step was to make the application, go through all the medical checks in Kalamata, which our family passed.

After WW II, the way most people came to Australia was by ship. The reason I want to emphasise that is because nowadays everyone thinks, 'Well, it's a twenty-four-hour, forty-eight-hour flight between Europe and Australia. No, in those days you got on a ship. But the point is what sort of a ship? One needs to understand that those ships were actually rust buckets. They were reject, World War II, anything; they just grabbed anything that floats, put people on to bring them out. In our case the ship was called the *Skaubryn*. Immigrants from many countries were on that ship. Another thirty or forty families that we met were Poles, Ukrainian, Italian and German families. Greek families, plus German families plus others, it wasn't just us just from the Greek side; it was also from others – Poles, Ukrainians, others. So on this boat called the M.S. *Skaubry*, which was a rust bucket, people would have to spend at least one month before they arrived in Australia.

To emphasise how unseaworthy these ships were. As soon as we disembarked in Melbourne, where most immigrants disembarked, the ship burnt and sank. So the condition of these ships was really very, very poor.

We ended up in Melbourne, went to a place called Bonegilla, which was an ex-Army camp. I remember as a four year-old, many experiences. From Bonegilla my father decided, in discussions with others that he would go to Woodside because there was some work on the railway line. My father explained to us that work on the railway line was in a place called Adelaide.

Woodside was an ex-Army camp – I think it may still exist in part (some buildings may not exist)- but in 1953, we came out soon after, about August, and my first impressions of Australia was these ex-Army camps and these great rats that used to jump up and down on their back legs. You never knew then what a kangaroo was. People told you what it was, but unless you actually see one jumping up and down you think it's a massive rat that jumps up and down on its back legs, and everybody thought, 'What the hell is this animal?' After a while you get used to

George GIANNOUPOULOS

animals such as kangaroos, and then you get used to a koala and possums etc. These animals weren't really animals that you would be conscious of or know of, especially in Europe because they don't exist in Europe. But my earliest impressions were that this was a totally different flora and fauna, and as a young child you can actually get those impressions very quickly.

As an example, Europeans used to think of animals such as sheep, goats and cows, which we saw also in Australia as domesticated animals. But other wild animals that were in Australia, people didn't domesticate them but they were wild, causing havoc.

What schools did you go to then?

We ended up going initially to Halifax Street, primary school, and also Sturt Street. Because my father and mother wanted to work, and you've got to understand that when you came to Adelaide you needed accommodation, they found some early Greek migrant that was here before WW 1, who had, I suppose, five rooms in a house at Halifax Street and said, 'Okay, fine, you can go in this room.' So it was one family per room. So if you had a villa, a house of five bedrooms, you'd have five families. You might have a German family in one room, a Polish family in the other room, Greek family in the other room. Each one then [shared] a common bathroom, a common kitchen. That was the first experience that you actually went through. I understood that it was a very straightforward and simple way of life that I went off to the primary school. But the interesting thing about the primary school was that I was of primary school age, but my brother Arthur was not of primary school age; he was about three and a half years old. My parents really couldn't just leave him around, so they sort of fudged the record and said, 'Pre-school, you must be about four or something.' Anyway, he trudged off with me and sat next to me at the school, and the teacher thought this was strange. 'This little character looks a bit different, doesn't look as though he's of school age.' I said, 'Oh, yes, he's okay.' I'll look after him.

So what happened next was that he actually learned things very quickly. He was

George GIANNOUPOULOS

intelligent enough to learn things very quickly, and before we know it he was attending school and doing exceptionally well. Both of us were moving ahead, so we progressed through the Education system, whether it was Halifax or Gilles Street school or at Sturt Street or at North Adelaide Primary School.

Primarily my father decided that it wasn't all that good working on the railway lines, he wanted to do something else to get ahead. So he tried to get some work in the factories, which most migrants did: they got work in factories, for example on Churchill Road, there used to be a factory that used to make Simpson cookers and other such things.

Right, yes.

So he worked in that factory for a while. Then somebody suggested to him that he could buy a cottage, (for example, for eight hundred pounds in North Adelaide). So we went to live in Archer Street, North Adelaide. My father borrowed eight hundred pounds from the bank and bought this cottage, and we subsequently went to another school. I've actually changed – I calculated – at least fifty different places, and also a dozen schools between 1953 and 1970 because most migrants would move around, wherever the work was. So then we went to North Adelaide Primary School.

Some early memories of school started to form when we'd stand up in the morning at assembly, as I'm sure you might be aware, you'd salute the flag, honour the Queen and all the rest of it, and it was a totally different resumé in terms of your concepts of what school was all about. Also at the same time we went to Greek School after hours. So you had the day school, which was learning the English language and understanding the Australian customs and traditions, and then going to Greek School. So those sorts of impressions were very clear in my mind. What other little nuances and customs that occurred during that time were, for example, when the Queen came to Australia, Queen Elizabeth came out in '54 I think –and she was doing a tour around Australia (after her coronation), and she went to the

George GIANNOUPOULOS

racecourse at Victoria Park and all the children from the school were taken to wave the flag. We were standing in the barriers and of course waved the flag, when the Queen and Prince Philip would come around. At one stage we had to break for lunch.

Now, my mother and father made me lunch of cheese, salami, olives and other things that were really not all that common in terms of what the Australian kid's sandwich was, and so everyone would have a go at you and say, 'What sort of muck is that? How can you eat this stuff?' And nowadays, of course, you pay a premium for exactly the same stuff that we used to sort of question. So the food was one of the first things you realised was different and the language and culture. The understanding of culture then started to form, because you knew there were differences. A child can actually register that difference by knowing that not only do you eat different food and you speak a different language and you behave in certain different ways and you have different cultural mores you live by. It was a living culture at home, so when you go home you speak Greek to your mother and father, you behave in a different way, you behave in a certain way, you eat certain foods, you do certain things, you relate in a different way to families, and the relationship between a Greek family and a non-Greek family. The Aussie family was different in a sense of how you related to each member of the family. There were many differences, and so a child can pick that up very quickly that there were significant differences. I'm not putting a value judgment on it by saying that one is good or one is bad; what I'm saying is there are differences and one has to recognise those differences.

In 1956, my father then decided to go to Renmark, at the time of the biggest flood ever (1956). There was a huge flood in Renmark. He was told that because of his rural background and his understanding about grapes and vines and olives and trees (he loved that rural background) because of his background he would do well if he went there. To get to Renmark my father ended up getting a soft-top Mini Morris that everyone would love to have nowadays, and so we were loaded into this soft-top Mini Morris with all our belongings, sold the house at Archer Street (it was an

George GIANNOUPOULOS

old cottage) and we headed off. It took five and a half hours to get to Barmera, because the roads weren't really all that good in those days. And I remember when we reached Barmera in this car (you can imagine, the top was open)- no-one thought of it as a trendy top in those days, it was just an open-top Morris Minor that you throw the family in and you carry all your goods and you have somebody coming behind with all your worldly possessions in a truck or trailer.

When we arrived in Barmera in the Riverland, the Riverland made an impression on me because it was totally different. It was a big sky, big blue sky. There was heat, you could hear different animals, birds. The soil was warm and as a child stepping barefoot onto the soil and you can feel the soil under your feet and you could smell the grapes, you could smell the vineyards. The feeling was so overwhelming for me that I instantly fell in love with the Riverland. I just loved it, I just thought it was the greatest thing in the world, because we were able very soon to move from Berri and Barmera to Renmark, because somebody had said to my father, 'Do you know that they've got flooded out in Renmark and the blocks are going real cheap, and if you go to Renmark you'll get a decent block at a cheap price?' So he thought, 'That sounds pretty good, we'll go there.' He ended up buying a block at Kulkyne Street, about thirty or forty acres, with the tractors and all the things that go with it, and the experience was fantastic. It was a fantasy world for children at my age, and you can imagine somebody who's eight years old and other children in that sort of age range where you had open water channels. We used to muck around like Huckleberry Finn. We built these great big floating pontoons. We would have these pontoons that we would go around on the channels, and some of the channels were quite large. Nowadays, of course, there's no channel there; but there used to be open channels at different parts of the River Murray, we used to go swimming, swinging off trees etc. I mean, for a child this was absolutely heaven. You made your own fun and invented stories.

George GIANNOUPOULOS

Did you go to high school there or was it not out there?

I went to primary school, Renmark West Primary School. My sister meanwhile was able to come and join us after a couple of years, because we were then able to apply to immigration on the basis of family reunion. My brother and I went to Renmark West Primary School. My sister (was a bit older) went off to high school.

The experience of Renmark West Primary in Renmark West was also very exciting for a child and also rewarding, in the sense that it was totally different to Adelaide. I think we were fortunate in being able to be welcomed so well, to be free to move around, to actually control your own destiny, which my father did, and we had a great time in Renmark. I suppose from that point of view, the experience in the Upper Murray for any child was a rewarding experience and in a way it's set up a basis for my thinking about migrant experiences.

We also saw another side to the Australian experience, in other words what we know as Anglo-Saxon. What happened was where you had a migration of non-Greeks and non-Italians moving through the Riverland you also had an established group of people that actually had bought property, but you also had a floating population of people that used to come in and out say during times that you would have pickers and you'd have pickers' quarters. You'd have people that would come in from cities or from towns, through the Riverland, and you got to meet all those people, and it was interesting to meet all these people because they were a different group. You met their children at school. For me looking at that, I could see that those people were in one way not a settled family that would not buy a block and settle: they were transient. So they'd come in, they would work for a month or two, then they'd move on. It's like a shearer moving in wherever the sheep has to be shorn and then move from one place to another to another, and this is what used to happen. It was an interesting experience. I met many other groups of Australians

But I might move on and say that that experience really was rewarding for my family and me because we were able then in the early '60s to come back to Adelaide. The motive to come back was that my mother became ill. She actually was a very, I suppose, ambitious person for herself and for her family and she said,

George GIANNOUPOULOS

‘No, well, what’s the use of waiting out here? We’re not going to be able to go to university, we’re not going to be able to educate children here, it’s pretty hard’, and the decision was made to come back to Adelaide against my father’s wishes at that time. In later times he changed his mind.

I can recall I think that time of what we call ‘chain migration’, which is extremely important for migrant history. My father was the kingpin of bringing out many other people. So he brought out many relatives and friends, and the number of people that used to come through our house was enormous. In Renmark alone there was my mother’s niece that came there from Greece and settled, and there were other relatives, friends, who actually he brought out from Greece. So my father in a way created his own chain migration. Many others would come along because they knew, ‘Well, Kon Giannopoulos is there with his family, that’s okay, we’ll go and work in the Upper Murray or we’ll go to Adelaide.’ So that occurred over that period of time and many relatives came out because of my father. Because he was the first, and so consequently we would see all these people coming and going through the house, and so the house was always full of people: somebody coming, somebody going, somebody leaving, somebody going to Adelaide. It was just full of people all the time and the concept of extended family, which of course was in decline in Australia. This change in family dynamics was something that was very clear in my mind, that there was a difference in how the families operated and how they worked with each other.

Well, that’s good. When you got to Adelaide – and I’m not too sure about the education sequence – what high school did you go to?

When we got to Adelaide we went initially one year to Ridley Grove Primary – that was the final year – and then went to Woodville High School. Woodville High School was an experience in itself because in those days you had people from the Ukraine, from Poland, from Germany, from Italy, from Greece, it was a whole mixture of people, and consequently Woodville High School was the epitome of the total migrant experience. You just had people from everywhere in the world. The experience at Woodville High School was rewarding for myself and my brother and

George GIANNOUPOULOS

my sister, and we actually ended up going to Woodville North, my father bought a fish and chip shop and I think we made the best fish and chips in Woodville North.

I'm sure.

That's what he says, anyway. (laughter)

And after that you went to which university, what course was it?

Id need to tell you first about the final years at high school. My experience was interesting in a sense that they had, in those days, what's known as streaming system, and they would stream children into A, B, C, D, E, F and G, and so consequently they would give them a test. Now, the test they would give would be to test if I had recall intelligence. I wasn't good at that test because to me the other types of intelligence – which I believe is analytical and emotional intelligence – were never tested. What they tested for was can you remember something in a particular time. Now, I wasn't particularly good at recall intelligence and I might not be able to tell you what happened in 1066, I might not be able to memorise but I certainly could find out and I could certainly analyse it for you, I could tell you why it happened and what happened and the consequences. But what happened in that test was that in the first year at Woodville High School I was put in – it was the 'dumb dodo' class, 1E. The 1A were the top, 1B were the second, 1C, D, E. So I ended up in the dumb dodo class.

They didn't realise that out of those forty-five or fifty children that ended up in that class, as we went through from year 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 you would actually matriculate in fourth year, you didn't matriculate in fifth. There was a transition period between '65 and '66 where they changed that, and in that particular time I kept on excelling in my analytical ability: in other words – give you a typical example – they used to have inspectors that came round to check on the teachers and one time a geography teacher said to us, as an example, he'd say, 'Look, the inspector's coming round. I really want you to be on your best behaviour because I'm getting tested.' (laughter) So what happened in that particular day was the teacher said, 'Look, we will discuss what's known as a "rain shadow" or we'll

George GIANNOUPOULOS

discuss where the rain falls on one side of the mountains and then precipitation falls on this side and then you have the rain shadow on the other side.’ During that discussion the inspector came in and the teacher started talking about this and I put my hand up and said, ‘Look, it’s obvious that what happens on one side of the mountain is the precipitation occurs on the other side as it falls down---.’ Anyway, this made the teacher absolutely happy as Larry because this showed to the inspector that this teacher was really communicating with the students and teaching them properly and all the rest of it. So the teacher came back later on and he said, ‘Thank you very much, that was very good’ – because no-one else would actually speak up and say anything.

At the end of each year the teacher would say, ‘Look, I’m sorry, but you guys that are in D, E and F, the lower classes, you guys can become tradesmen. You can become a boilermaker or, look, why don’t you become a carpenter?’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘I didn’t particularly want to become a carpenter or a boilermaker or a plumber; I really want to continue on.’ ‘Oh, no, no,’ you know, ‘I don’t know why you want to continue on.’ But anyway, each year I’d keep passing and I got to fourth year and actually matriculated. That teacher turned around and kept saying, ‘This is ridiculous. I never thought you would matriculate.’ Out of the fifty children that were in that class at 1st year high school, I was the only one that actually matriculated because the others believed that they could not achieve – it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy: if you say to a child, ‘Look, you are dumb and stupid and you’re not going to get anywhere; you should become a carpenter’, well, after a while, that child picks up on that. The difference with me was I wasn’t prepared to accept that because it was my own upbringing that didn’t allow me, and I think it was partially because of my mother, to accept that. So I kept on matriculating twice and kept going into leaving honours, and then ended up with the A stream passing and matriculating to go off to teachers’ college and university.

The interesting story that I’ll finish off about this teacher that kept on saying, ‘Look, you guys should become carpenters or plumbers’, that teacher had not completed his studies properly and years later, when I was lecturing at the Institute

George GIANNOUPOULOS

of Technology and I was giving my lecture, he actually came in and sat in front of my class, which was an absolutely surprising – he was dumbfounded. Here was I, who was his student, years later becoming his lecturer. He was sitting, looking at me and he just couldn't believe that this was the same person. So he came to me at the end of my lecture, because I was a specialist in cultural sociology and ethnic minorities, he came to me at the end of the lecture and said, 'I find it hard to believe that I tried to convince you to become a plumber.' (laughter) And I said to him, 'Well, don't feel so bad about it because plumbing would have been quite nice.'

That's right.

'It's not such a bad thing to become a plumber.' 'But,' he said, 'I've just got one question for you. I've got to complete my studies and I'm wondering how you're going to mark me in this –' (laughter) '– given the fact that I've been badgering you for the past X number of years that you become a plumber.' Well, I sat back and thought about it. I said, 'Look, I'll tell you what. I'm going to mark you in a similar way that you marked me when I was a student', which made it more complex because he was sitting there thinking to himself, 'I wonder how this guy's going to mark me.' (laughter)

Anyway, to make a long story short, I finished high school and those days we had what's known as 'bonded' students with the Education Department and they needed teachers desperately. So they would come into the classroom at Woodville High School and say, 'Look, if you want to become a teacher we'll actually pay you a certain amount to become a teacher. You come to Western Teachers' College or you come to the Adelaide College of Advanced Education to become a teacher.' So I was bonded. Those days we actually "got bonded" and actually signed up that that's what I was going to do. I decided, 'Well, that sounds like a good idea. I'll become a teacher.' So I signed up and I ended up going to Western Teachers' College.

The only difference was that Western Teachers' College wanted you to stay for two years then go out teaching because of the influx of population. Quickly you got

George GIANNOUPOULOS

a diploma or associate diploma of teaching, then get out. The only problem was that I didn't want to get out. I kept on going to uni. I said, 'Well, hang on a second, I've matriculated. I can do my diploma of teaching, but what if I ran the university studies parallel to my diploma?' 'Oh, yes, okay. Well, you've got to really perform.' I said, 'Okay, I'm prepared to give it a try', and I did pass my university studies and ran the BA degree with the diploma of teaching at the same time, ran them together. At the end of the second year they said, 'Well, it's highly unlikely – we don't really want you to stay for a third year, we need teachers out there.' But there were only a small number of students out of the group of hundreds and they said, 'Right, you stay and do third year.' Then at the end of third year I wanted to complete my honours degree and get on and finish my M. A. qualifications at university, Adelaide Uni. And they said, 'Well, okay. Well, look: only one of two fourth year students are permitted. I was one of two students in the fourth year, okay, we'll have one.' That was me. It was the only student in the whole college that actually got permission to go off at the time to complete my postgraduate studies. You had to have a reason why you were staying back, because they were desperate to get teachers out. So in one sense I was fortunate, in that way, to complete that fourth year. I in fact I was an Adelaide University student because there was no fourth-year courses at Western Teachers' College. In fact, third-year courses were, as I said, already limited in a sense that they really wanted you to go out and teach, they were desperate for teachers, and so I was fortunate enough to go on to fourth year and then try and complete my honours degree and then go on to do my master's and I also started my PhD at Flinders Uni.

Wow, that's good, yes.

So that's the experience of my educational sort of stream of what happened.

As to how we got to the aspect of the migration stuff, I can explain and discuss that in a moment as to where this whole ethnic minorities and where this all fitted in to that particular time and that particular place. It wasn't the fact that I just dropped out of the sky in that I mean, all my life's experience had to do with migrant,

George GIANNOUPOULOS

migration, cultural differences, *et cetera*, so it wasn't foreign to me that all of a sudden I would be lecturing or teaching in this area. It was in fact both a theoretical analysis plus a practical experience of knowing exactly what the migrant experience was. So that's how that started to gel and come together.

You were the only one or one of the few studying and working in this sort of area ---?

In those days Sociology was a new field. It came out of America, and in the I suppose late '60s, early '70s Sociology was a field that was just beginning. Although it was previously set in a Social Science context, it then became in itself a *bona fide* subject that you could take. At that time there was an opportunity for the Social Work diploma and then consequently the degree at the Institute of Technology here at North Terrace – now, of course, part of the University of South Australia. I was already tutoring in the area, I was already tutoring in the area because the Modern Greek Studies had started at the Adelaide College of Advanced Education and I was one of the first lecturers, in fact, to be involved with the establishment: not that I'm a linguist, but I took the cultural element of it, that being ethnic minorities in relation to sociology for people studying the language of Greece. I'm not a linguist.

Who was the guru at the time in this area, if anybody? What sort of academics were drawing on?

I have to draw on the fields of political sociology and philosophy, both ancient and modern: American and European academics of the 50's and 60's. On the local scene. Paul Tuffin was appointed as a lecturer in Modern Greek. There was a number of others who were tutoring at the time, and the Modern Greek Studies was in fact an addendum to the diploma courses at Adelaide College. I also did some tutoring and lecturing at the Western Teachers' College [where] in fact I was a student initially and took Sociology there and then at Adelaide University did Political Sociology as a major. But I was able to go from tutoring and lecturing at Western Teachers' College, Adelaide Teachers' College and taking the position of

George GIANNOUPOULOS

lecturer in charge of Ethnic Minorities Cultural Studies at the Institute of Technology.

Those early years were people who were primarily trying to establish language courses – both Italian and Greek, which were the two dominant ones. The Asian languages and the Asian influence that we're now experiencing in the new century wasn't an issue at the time. There just weren't enough. There wasn't the population of Asian people here. And if you go off to what I call 'Little Vietnam' or 'Little China' or whatever, those areas didn't exist in those days. When you went to Hanson Road and Woodville High School, those days in those areas were predominantly Polish, Ukraine, Italian, Greek, German, Russian. Really it had very little to do with an Asian influence. Asian influence came later on, and now you can go and see it, witness it. So in a sense my educational experience in terms of the setting up of language courses and setting up of cultural courses for the Social Work degree and other degrees and diplomas was really between the Adelaide College of Advanced Education and the Institute of Technology, they were the two areas that were primarily involved in that.

The Social Work area, where I got involved with Social Work was that there was a position for a person in charge of the Ethnic Minorities, and at that time Richard Nies was in charge.

Who were the academic writers that you might have been drawing on, if you can recall them?

A lot of the academic writers, there were the theoretical sociologists and you could read all kinds of cultural sociology. The main academic writers of that time were Price C.A., Zubricki J, Martin C, Wilson P.R., Cronin C, Taft R, Appleyard R.T.. Some overseas academics were Saloutos T (USA), Mead M (USA) and Toffler F (Canada).

Yes, but particularly in migration type of thing.

In migration at the time there were very few – very, very few – and so the experiences that you were getting was more European and American influence. In

George GIANNOUPOULOS

other words, you were picking up research that was coming in from the UK and America. Australia hadn't actually had very much research in this and in some of the work that I was doing was actually all new. My honours degree that looked at educational and social issues – the copies are actually in the State Library and also at the Barr Smith Library – my master's degree, was all new research that very few people had started. At that time – this was slightly pre-Grassby era in a sense, because Grassby came a little bit later, '75, and then there was far more emphasis with the Whitlam Government, and when the emphasis changed to recognise the contribution that migrants had made and to analyse and to see what was going on, then research started flowing and many people would then begin their research and analysis. But a lot of the stuff was coming from overseas; it wasn't from Australia.

Good.

PART II

This is the second part of the interview for the Don Dunstan History Project dated 18th July 2007. George Giannopoulos is the interviewee and George Lewkowicz is the interviewer.

We'll keep going, George. Thanks very much for the information you've provided to date, which gives us a terrific context for where we'll be going next. Can you talk about your work at the Institute and then, in relation to that, how you met Stephen Wright and who he was?

Yes. I think the progression from the Adelaide College, my lecturing and tutoring there, and also the Western Teachers' College in Sociology and in particular Ethnic Minorities allowed me then to be in a good position to apply for the head of Sociology and Cross-Cultural Studies for the diploma and eventually the degree in Social Work at the Institute of Technology.

Initially, this was in those mid- to- late-'70s, this was a new field. This was a field that very few people had actually ventured into, apart from some geographers in the eastern universities – that means in Melbourne and in Sydney – who actually had done some work on migration. Most of it was done on the basis of geographical migration – in other words, where the population was going, what it was doing there

George GIANNOUPOULOS

in terms of their employment, why were the migrants going there, where was the need – and it was done by geographers who actually were getting research funds from the Commonwealth Government. So pre-1975 to 1980 the research was really orientated towards looking at where the population was going and what it was doing and how. There was very little to do with the social context of the population, so a lot of the migration research you could see was done by geographers in some academic institution somewhere in the Eastern States. And so when you read about it you read about the ABS¹ statistics at that particular time and what that told us about where the migrants were going and where the population was shifting. So it was logical then the next step to take, that somebody looking at cross-cultural studies and sociology to examine what the social impact on society was and where were you going to actually implement social policy, and how were you going to implement social policy, and what were the needs, what were the areas of need within the community as these populations were coming in to Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and the main centres? This was an opportunity for me to apply for a position at the now University of South Australia but it used to be called the Institute of Technology in the Department of Social Work, and the position became available for expanding the knowledge in this area because social workers were going to come up against this and they needed some skills and some tools to handle this.

I was appointed on the basis of looking at the sociological perspective and the cultural perspective of what was the social worker going to be faced with and how we could actually arm the social worker with the necessary concepts and tools, mental constructs and other tools, to be able to handle this migration that occurred post-World War II. So when I took up the position I was in North Terrace and I prepared programs in conjunction with the Sociology crew and the Social Work crew, prepared programs for implementing a knowledge base and a skills base for

¹ ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics.

George GIANNOUPOULOS

social workers. In doing that I came across, (in doing my lectures), various people who were involved already in both administration of government and also within the Department for Community Welfare and other departments that were actually coming in either to augment their qualifications or to add to their qualifications.

Now, while I was in one of my lectures – and I'll just explain in this particular story how it relates to Don Dunstan in this particular area – is that a person called Steve Wright happened to be in my lecture theatre at the time. I got to know him only from the point of view that he identified himself and said, 'Look, I work in the Premier's Department, and the Premier's Department is particularly interested in looking at policy and implementation of policy in a new area which is this whole migrant area, cross-cultural area, multicultural area, call it what you want.' We were all grasping concepts at the time because initially, with the advent of immigration post-World War II, there was this concept of 'assimilation', which meant that everyone must become similar to whatever that similar standard was, and that policy of assimilation of course after a while wasn't working all that well because no-one knew whatever you were supposed to assimilate to, apart from the idea that you should know the English language, which everyone accepted. But because of the many cultures the diversity of culture was actually an advantage to Australia, not a disadvantage, and so then we moved from the concept of assimilation to the concept of multiculturalism and the idea of diversity. That was starting to come into the research, that was starting to come through in policy.

So Steve Wright came along and said to me, 'Look, I work in the Premier's Department and I'm particularly interested in developing my skills in this cross-cultural area; and also I've been discussing this with Don, who also wishes to further the whole idea of multiculturalism.' So I asked the question, 'Well, who's Don?' (laughter) I said, 'Who's Don?' And he said, 'Well, you know, Don, the Premier. Don Dunstan.' I said, 'Okay, right, okay, now we know what we're talking about, okay.' So that was the first introduction to the whole idea of my connection with Don Dunstan.

George GIANNOUPOULOS

So he stayed on doing my whole program of lectures and did the course, and was reporting back to Don Dunstan about this person called George Giannopoulos who was doing research and was lecturing in an area that was a new area for that time and it was an area that we needed to deal with and we needed to expand and provide not only a policy but programs for implementation.

So what year was this?

This would have been between '74 and '77 –

Right, okay.

– 1975–1977, that was the era, and in that particular time this was a new field. So Steve Wright invited me to go to Parliament House to have a private meeting with Don Dunstan and then we were going to go to a restaurant called Derringers] on North Terrace in which we would discuss further what the concept was, because at that stage it was all very much in the planning stage. There was a welfare officer attached to the Premier's Department and her name was Eva Koussidis, so Eva Koussidis had already been in Premier's as a social worker. Her role was primarily to take inquiries, it was called the Inquiry Unit. So people would turn up and see Eva and would inquire about certain issues and problems, and what she found (because she was from Greek background) would highlight their particular issues that they wanted to raise, whether it was interpreting/translating, information services and other services

At that stage there was no Ethnic Affairs Branch as such and there was no policy or programming and there was no co-ordinated activity to actually implement anything. So when I went and saw Don Dunstan in Parliament the discussion went something like this. He basically said to me that he felt that there was this need (which was going to) increase and our society was changing, and the more he talked about cultural diversity, the more he talked about the issues that also the Federal Government and Whitlam had brought up, the more he discussed them, the more I realised that he was serious about the whole idea of multiculturalism. He was serious about having a program, a policy and an implementation and he was also

George GIANNOUPOULOS

serious about setting up some government mechanism that would influence other government departments – be they education, welfare, health, *et cetera*. So what impressed me about Don Dunstan was that he was genuine about his desire. It wasn't something that he was doing for some political purpose and he wasn't asking me to become involved for the purpose that it looked good for cosmetic reasons; he was actually quite serious and intuitive about this and he had an ability to be able to sort of zero in on issues that I thought were of an enlightened nature – given the time and given the place, given the fact that we'd come from an assimilation policy, which the Federal Government had previously adopted – I agreed with his whole idea and concept about where he wanted to see things go. So we got on exceptionally well because we were talking the same issues, we were talking about the same things, we were talking about policies and programs. He said, 'Well, look, do you want to become involved in this?' And I said, 'Of course I do. This sounds wonderful, this is exactly what I wish to become involved in.'

When we went across to Derringers and we were having a meal there, I kept on referring to him as 'Mr Premier' and what again impressed me was he said, 'Don't refer to me as "Mr Premier". My name is Don, call me "Don".'

Yes, 'Don'.

That's what he wanted. He was a straightforward person, – he wasn't there for airs and graces and he wasn't there for setting up structures that would impose communication; he was there, in my book, to actually try and get things done, and he was genuine about it. That's what impressed me most about him. Also he had a great grasp of what he wanted. He actually had a very clear understanding of where he wanted to go with this. So I immediately jumped at the opportunity and said, 'Yeah, I'll be part of this. I think it's a wonderful idea, you should set it up and I think we should have more detailed meetings about how, what the structure of this should be and how it should be implemented.'

George GIANNOUPOULOS

Can you recall some of the issues, like some of the specifics on policies and programs?

Yes, absolutely. There were very clear issues that were raised. For example, interpreting and translating in government departments, in hospitals: when I was a young child, when I went to the Royal Adelaide Hospital here in North Adelaide my father picked me up and sat me on a table and asked me to translate a particular medical problem. I remember very clearly that I had to, as a young child, translate everything. Now, most migrant experiences went that way. Most children were actually asked to be interpreters and translators. So here was something very obvious and very straightforward: you needed interpreters and translators in hospitals and health areas, in welfare areas and in government departments, because many of the migrants simply couldn't handle the language; and especially in the judiciary. Can you imagine having a judiciary and a person turning up and not knowing what was going on? You needed that, and at that time there wasn't. It was *ad hoc*, the whole idea of interpreting and translating, so you needed specifically an interpreting and translating unit for hospitals and courts.

Secondly, you needed an information service. You needed a service that actually was not only for Adelaide – we established in fact eventually a service in Adelaide, Felixstow, the Riverland and Whyalla – where migrants could go and get some information about all kinds of things: what government department, what education, what welfare, and the list can go on and on. So that was the second clear concept which we both agreed on immediately. So you've got interpreting and translating, you've got an information service that needed to be implemented.

You also needed a policy and program to be able to influence other government departments. Now, other government departments – be they education, welfare, health, whatever – you had to have some policy and program that would give them an impetus to actually work in with migrants, because a lot of the material that was sent out – whether it's council rates, water rates, whether it's got to do with official Centrelink or welfare or whatever – if you send out information that people don't understand and can't read, well, obviously you're going to have a problem because

George GIANNOUPOULOS

if you have a certain percentage of your society that's actually speaking Greek, Italian, Ukrainian, Polish and other languages, you're going to have a problem trying to communicate with that group of people. So it was important to influence government departments to be sensitive and aware of what was going on out in the community. That was the third one, that was the big one, the policy that you had; and of course you needed some form of co-ordination, you needed a body to be able to co-ordinate that activity and try and implement some of these things. So there was a very clear, specific thing of what required to be done.

In fact, these things were done. Were done at the time, way before other States had even moved. We were way ahead of other States.

Did he talk about the Commonwealth experience at all, like there was Al Grassby and the Whitlam Government. The Whitlam Government had got sacked in '75 when (laughter) you started all of this; was there any flow-on from that, or was it mainly local?

Well, there was two aspects in relation to that. Grassby at the time had been pushing very hard for the whole idea of multiculturalism and in fact, to his credit, he stuck his neck out at the time to get the initiative going in multiculturalism. Not only did he stick his neck out, but he tried to do something about it by introducing legislation into the Commonwealth area. So we already had known that Grassby and Whitlam had tried to do something in relation to that. We already had information or knowledge about where the Federal Government, in particular the Whitlam Government, had endeavoured to go with all this. The unfortunate situation is they didn't have time to do anything about it because if you can imagine they came in, what, '72, out '75 or something, it wasn't really a long time to be able to sort out and focus on something that needed a lot more time than two or three years to be able to implement. Consequently Don Dunstan felt that we had to move past that and not rely on the Commonwealth, because the trouble with relying on the Commonwealth [was] you basically had a Department of Immigration concerned about people coming and people going: their interest was who was coming in and who was going out and what was the population of Australia and whatever; it wasn't

George GIANNOUPOULOS

really interested in the whole concept of multiculturalism at the time. When Grassby and the Whitlam Government came in, they wanted to do something about it and of course you don't have time to do it in two or three years, it's impossible. So Don Dunstan had this idea that we really must continue this, we really must continue this, and that's when in the early days Grassby got involved more and more in terms of the Federal Ethnic Affairs Commission on the federal level, that's where that started, and so you had the federal impetus happening. You had a state impetus happening.

This was under Fraser, or before?

This was post-Whitlam.

Post-Whitlam, Fraser, yes – Malcolm Fraser.

Yes, post-Whitlam. Because what had happened at the time, I think Fraser – to his credit, too – realised that if you don't do something about it you're really going backwards. You just can't stop. You're faced with populations in Sydney and Melbourne and Brisbane and Adelaide that were very clearly, obviously, having an influence on society. Today if you have, let's say we've got three hundred thousand Greeks alone in Melbourne, maybe four hundred thousand Italians, maybe two hundred and fifty thousand Greeks in Sydney and maybe sixty thousand Greeks in Adelaide, just the sheer volume of numbers and the needs within the community, the two largest communities being Italian and Greek – – –. Because there were, (not to forget), earlier migration of the 1850s where you have not only the Cornish and the Welsh and the miners in 1840s, but you also had the Germans coming out in the 1850s. But they were already settled in to places like the Barossa Valley, Hahndorf and other places, and Klemzig in the early days. They had already come here for religious reasons. They didn't come here for economic reasons, primarily, a lot of them, a lot of the German migrants; they were here because of religious persecution, and they were already part of the fabric, part of the Australian fabric. So it wasn't that you were looking at those earlier movements of the Cornish, the Welsh and the early German movement of population; you were looking at a new, post-World

George GIANNOUPOULOS

War II of Greeks and Italians that were actually *huge* numbers of people coming over here. So something had to be done, and the Fraser Government had to actually cope with this sort of stuff. That's why then Grassby continues on the work, that you see the work continuing, and that's where you see Don Dunstan continuing on the work here. It's logical that the work then took a life of its own and a certain impetus, and I being part of it was an exciting time.

I don't think it could ever be repeated at the time because when something new is coming in it's exciting in a sense that you have an opportunity to determine a destiny, and that was what we were doing at the time, and the people that got involved, (others were on the periphery). For example, Alex Gardini who was at the Institute of Technology was in General Studies. He never had any great interest in multicultural and ethnic affairs until I turned up and of said, 'Hey, do you know you've got an Italian background?' and woke up people with Italian backgrounds. So I see myself more as a catalyst, as a person that actually could get things going and to act in such a way that things start to work. And once you get it going you then need to come up with practical plans, practical policies and practical implementation that actually gives benefit to the community that you're working for.

What did Don promise you? Did he say, 'We'll get behind you and blah-blah-blah'?

In terms of the idea of Ethnic Affairs Branch, are you saying?

Yes, that's right.

What his plan was, he said, 'If we establish an Ethnic Affairs Branch, we should have a policy area and an implementation area and we should have a number of people that come together who are committed, who are passionate about what it's on about and actually to be able to implement it.' So you needed people who had a knowledge, who had skills and who were knowledgeable in an area. The first people that were appointed was myself and Alex Gardini, and then we worked from there and then what he said was, 'Okay, we know that the two main arms of the

George GIANNOUPOULOS

branch are the policy side and the implementation side. Now you go ahead and make it happen, but keep me informed as to what's going on and keep in touch with me to let me know where this is all heading and how it's all going.' So in those early years he wanted to be personally pushing this along. He didn't want to sit back and sort of say, 'Well, there you are, off you go.' Steve Wright acted as the conduit, so Steve being his personal assistant at the time was more than just a personal assistant because he'd let him know what was going on and also inform him about what was happening in this whole area. That's in the early days.

And you were originally in the Premier's Department, you said.

Originally we were in the Premier's Department. We started off next to Eva Koussidis, and Alex and myself started off in that area, simply as an embryo situation finding out how we were going to actually work and where we were going to go and what we were going to do. It was an area that we needed to first begin because it gave it some impetus. Being in the Premier's Department gave it a little bit more kudos, whereas if they'd stuck out in the middle of Oodnawoopwoop it would be just another little department stuck in the middle of nowhere. So the concept that Don Dunstan had, and the way he explained it to me, was if he was able to bring it in initially into the Premier's Department it would give it some stamp of authority and so other government departments would think, 'Ooh, hang on a second, we'd better pay a bit of attention to this. This is not just some political manoeuvre in the backblocks somewhere.' So his concept was, 'Let's give it an impetus and give it some stamp of authority so we can actually move.'

Did he give you an open cheque on resources?

Not an open cheque on resources, but I think very much an open way of being able to justify. You had to justify what you did, and he would say, 'Okay, you need to justify what resources you needed, but let's see if we can find those resources.' He wasn't going to hold back on providing resources, because we needed someplace to work from, we needed staff, we needed etc. But it wasn't just, 'Just throw money at it', which I think shows that you had to actually prove that there were some benefits

George GIANNOUPOULOS

coming out of it and rewards coming out of it. It wasn't just that simple, 'Well, you need to just throw money at it and it's all going to happen.'

You and Alex were new to the public service. What allies did you have in the public service to help you out on it?

Absolutely none when we started. And when you start, you've got no allies. You've got no-one, you know no-one. You come from an academic background and you may have some notion of where you've got to go and what you've got to do, but in terms of any kind of allies you had to actually convince people by the force of your argument and your ability to convince different government departments and people within those departments that what you're talking about makes sense; that not only what you're talking about makes sense, but what you're talking about actually is in their *interest*. And the hardest part was to make them realise that if the Department for Community Welfare and the people that ran it didn't understand it was in their interests and it would help them as a beneficial thing, there were benefits to be gained by doing what we're suggesting, you're wasting your time. With the Education Department there were benefits to be gained, there were rewards to be gained; and in the areas of health, migrant health, there were rewards, there were gains that were real. So you not only had to convince them by the force of your argument but you actually had to demonstrate benefits they would gain from it, and that was critical in our ability to be able to convince different government departments that what we were doing is not a threat to them but an actual augmentation of their work, an assistance to them. Because most government departments form what's known as a 'fortress mentality' and they really don't want somebody else coming and telling them how they should do it, and so consequently every government department has its own little empire and own people that actually don't want others coming in. So you had to tread very carefully, you had to have what I call an emotional intelligence, to be able to understand how you handle those people, that you were not a threat, that you weren't coming in as a threatening from the top – you were going to come in with a hammer and whack them over the head; you actually had to convince them. So I

George GIANNOUPOULOS

suppose from that point of view our whole position was that we had to be diplomatic about how we handled it provided we were able to achieve our goals.

Were there any particular people who gave you a hand that you can recall?

Yes, I think there were a number. Jim Giles in Education was particularly helpful, and other people in Education – the list is too long to go through now, but there were many people in Education. There were quite a number of people in Welfare that actually understood what we were on about. There were people in the Health area that came forward, and also other people that were actually more hard-nosed administrators in Local Government, and they would see what you were trying to get at. In particular I'm trying to think of the name of a very good administrator in Local Government.

Not Ian McPhail?

Ian McPhail, who in fact I felt, as a person who wasn't really in the area, had any knowledge of skills in the area, was prepared to listen to the force of your argument.

Okay, good.

And other people like him that were very receptive, in particular when we produced the Ethnic Affairs Directory at the time. It showed that we had over four hundred organisations in that time, and four hundred organisations of ethnic background that actually existed here in Adelaide – clubs, societies, institutions. Nobody ever thought you had four hundred of them, (laughs) but they actually existed! Four hundred organisations! And Ian McPhail looked around and he said, 'Where did you find these people?' I said, 'I didn't find them; they exist.' They exist. And each organisation has a hierarchy: it has a president and a committee. And then all of a sudden we discovered, 'Well, hang on a second, there's a whole bunch of ethnic festivals that go on.' Apart from the Schützenfest, which we know has been going on for years, there were other festivals that went on as a cultural expression of a particular community.

George GIANNOUPOULOS

All of a sudden there was a realisation that, ‘Hang on a second: people are turning up in court and not being able to interpret properly. People turning up in the health area and not being able to understand’, and when we approached them we were able to establish and co-ordinate an interpreting and translating service for the courts; an interpreting and translating service for the hospitals, for the health area; an information service that was actually set up within the Branch itself and also in the regional areas, in the Riverland in particular. Then there was also the policy section that Alex Gardini would be involved in more and more, and his area more and more became policy driven. Then I became more and more involved in implementation, so I’d have to look at the policy and say, ‘Well, how is this going to affect that and who do we have to see and what are we going to do?’ So the two of us worked very well together in terms of a balancing act, and we worked I think in a very constructive way to be able to do things together. And of course you had the academic institutions that started to spring up with languages and other courses. So that actually evolved at that time.

Don Dunstan’s idea of not only having a policy but implementing the policy, he was extremely happy with this because he could see it – he used to turn up to a lot of these events. He would genuinely enjoy them. He would turn up many, whether it was the Greek Community Hall in Franklin Street or whether it was the Schützenfest or whether it was a Dutch festival, he’d turn up to all these events; and if he couldn’t, then he’d send somebody else to turn up.

How did you relate to the community groups? Was that supportive?

As a government officer?

Yes, as a government officer.

Well, there’s two ways you relate to them: as a government officer doing a job; and as a person. To do your job properly, you couldn’t be dispassionate or disconnected from them. If you turn up as a government officer and you sort of say, ‘Well, look, I’m here doing a job’, and you had no interest, no passion and no commitment to the area, they would pick it up so quickly that you’d be out in about three seconds flat,

George GIANNOUPOULOS

and so you would be finished. Because of my background many people knew me. I was involved with committees and clubs and societies way back in my university days, so when I was at the Adelaide University I was involved with the Australian Greek University Association, so I was already involved in clubs and societies at that time. I was already involved with cultural groups and music and theatre. So my involvement helped me because people knew that I was actually genuine about what I was doing – it was part of me, it was part of my inner fabric – and so there wasn't any problem for me turning up because people knew who I was and knew that I was committed to it. But if I acted as though I was just an officer, and some of them, one or two people from different departments of course would take very much an administrative line and turn up and say, 'Well, I'm from the Department for Community Welfare and I'm here to tell you what to do', they never got very far. Nothing would actually happen, because people would back off and say, 'Oh, no, here's another government officer coming telling us what to do.'

The classic case that I sometimes refer to is I was involved also in the committee that allocated funds for different festivals and somebody from the Dutch community turned up and said to me, 'You know, the committee has only given us a very small amount', whether it was five hundred dollars or a thousand dollars, 'towards our festival, and I want to lodge a complaint that this is not enough. We should have been getting a lot more, because all the others get a lot more.' And I said, 'Well, what makes you think that all the others are getting a lot more? We only have a certain, limited budget.' We might have had thirty thousand to allocate, say, or forty thousand. It was a seeding fund; it wasn't really to set the whole festival up. As soon as I explained to them and showed them that even the large communities like the Greeks and Italians and others didn't really get very much more anyway in proportion to the population, they realised that they weren't really being discriminated against. So you actually had to be careful how you handled each individual ethnic group, because some of them would think that the major groups got a lion's share of what was going on, so you had to do a balancing act and you had to explain that. So I was received very well, no matter where I went, simply

George GIANNOUPOULOS

because they knew of my history and commitment, because it wasn't that I'd just dropped out of the sky.

I had established other things during my university days, for example the national conference of Greek university students that is now the national NUGAS around Australia: I established that with three other people. One was the NSW Uni. President from Sydney, John Castrission, one a Melbourne Uni. President and one was a Uni. President, Con Berbatis from Western Australia. What we did was in 1969–70, we basically communicated with each other while we were all at uni: 'If we're going to know what's going on in each State with different groups that existed, we, shouldn't be having a national conference to be able to discuss issues to do with migration, issues to do with culture – apart from the cultural issues and social issues, there was also social interaction' and they agreed it was a great idea. The first national convention was in Sydney in 1971. So I had enough connections through the education, through other fields, that when I went out into the community people knew who I was and they knew that I was involved. There was always somebody who knew somebody else, and Adelaide is like that – so you know a teacher who knows the other person who knows that social worker who knows something – and there was a lot of connection through that.

I won't go into the dynamics of the issues within ethnic communities because this is a vast new area, I don't want to go there. It's just too vast, we'd spend all day discussing it. But you had to have knowledge of the different ethnic groups and their differences and desires and motivations. You couldn't go in there like a greenhorn and not understand. For example, the Serbo-Croatian issue, which today may not seem all that serious– those days, it was a big issue. So if you call a Croatian a Serbian and a Serbian a Croatian and you're in a lot of trouble. If you knew nothing about that and some minister or some government worker went in and called a Croatian a Serbian and a Serbian a Croatian and said, 'Oh, you bunch are all together, aren't you? You're all Serbo-Croatians, aren't you?' Well, you'd have a hell of a bloody uproar. You know, you had to be very careful as to what you did and how you handled it, and these were the issues that I already had tackled

George GIANNOUPOULOS

previously so I was able to advise ministers and others as to, 'Look, if you are going to go into that area, you really need to do a little bit of homework because you'll end up insulting somebody or causing so much bloody strife that it's counter-productive.' And it's a similar situation today with whether we're talking about Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodians, *et cetera*, you just can't lump them all in together and say, 'Ah, well, we'll put all of them together and things will be fine.' It doesn't work that way.

Yes. Don would have had his direct lines to some of these community leaders. Did that get in your way, or did it help you?

Well, sometimes it got in the way and sometimes it helped. What used to happen was the community leaders wanted to have direct access to Don, and so if they had a whinge or a problem or an issue one of the things that really caused problems to us, (trying to implement things and do things), is community leaders would actually go direct to him *via* electoral offices or the political process. This would cause all kinds of problems because they would go there and, whether it was church groups, non-church groups and others, they would go directly and say, 'This is our beef, this is our problem', and all of a sudden we'd get a request from the Premier's Department saying that Mr Such-and-such has turned up to see Don Dunstan and he's asking this question and that question and that question: 'Could you please help us in being able to handle this situation?' So we would then spend an inordinate amount of time just trying to work out what exactly had happened, and what we found was they were using the political process to try to move their own particular agendas, and that really caused a lot of strife for us. We were trying to work out why, what their motive was, and eventually you would see their motive because it would be obvious after a while as to what they were doing. But going through that political process caused us all kinds of problems. And it didn't actually achieve much, because all they did was cause trouble amongst themselves, and the greatest enemy of a lot of the ethnic groups was themselves, they actually don't co-ordinate and don't work together.

A typical example: one group approached me once and said, 'You've helped us

George GIANNOUPOULOS

in a Commonwealth bid, a grant, for a child care centre, and this was good for one side. But, you know, we come from the other side and you should be doing exactly the same for us on this side.’ I said, ‘Hang on a second. This is not a question of your side, my side and everyone else’s side. If there is a need for a child care centre in a particular place at a particular time and you can justify that, that will be seen upon its merits.’ So having explained all that to them, what would they do? They’d use the political process, so they’d run off and see Don Dunstan. Then Don Dunstan would send down a note and he’d say – to Ethnic Affairs or through whoever it would be in the Premier’s Department – ‘Send Ethnic Affairs a note and ask what’s going on here.’ So that note would come down to us and we would have to explain: ‘Look, on merit, the child care centre was funded to the tune of X dollars by the Commonwealth because of (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g).’ So he’d then go back and they’d go and see him again and he’d have to explain that, and that’s what caused us a lot of problems in the sense that it was counter-productive, it actually didn’t produce anything. If they’d come and seen us directly and we could explain it to them, they might have stopped all this going through on the political process. The whole ethnic affairs area is a highly-charged political area. Most ethnic groups know how the political process works and they’ll go to their local member of parliament, the minister, Premier, and they invite them to different shows and naturally, while they’ve invited them there, they’ll tell them their grievances and bypass us. That did actually cause us some concern in the sense that – not that we were concerned for ourselves. The concern was it was counter-productive to the implementation of what we were trying to do and it actually ceased in some ways to produce good results at the end of the day, that’s all our concern was, that it actually was a waste of time most of the time.

Did you go to any Commonwealth–State meetings at all, the ministerial meetings?

In some cases I was involved with the meetings between the Commonwealth and the State in relation to try and have some co-ordination and especially when Grassby was involved with the Commission, which was in Canberra. Often we would have

George GIANNOUPOULOS

meetings where we would try and co-ordinate Commonwealth activities with State activities. Now, this was a mixed bag of tricks because sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't work, and the problem you had there was again you had Commonwealth ministers with a certain agenda to push, State ministers with a different agenda to push, different political parties you might be dealing with, and then the change of political parties too. Of course, when Dunstan fell ill, that caused all kinds of issues and problems because you then had to renegotiate your position and renegotiate what was going on with other Ministers. I'm not saying that when Dunstan went all of a sudden the whole thing fell apart; on the contrary, in fact it continued on. Tonkin was quite understanding and sympathetic. David Tonkin, he wanted the whole thing to continue. And Murray Hill was also very sympathetic and understanding to these issues, so it need not necessarily sort of all fall apart. But what would happen would be there'd be a change in a particular emphasis and you had to then justify that change. But Don Dunstan's idea and vision of what the concept of what he wanted was something that can't be understated because, without him actually pushing that along and having that connection with Grassby in the Commonwealth, I think we would have been struggling even further.

Were there any clangers or major failures over this time when Don was involved?

I think while Don was involved, things had a consistency to them. When he left, the problem we had (when we were discussing this and sort of reminiscing), the problem we had was because of the change in the political climate and the change of emphasis, then subsequent both Labor and Liberal Governments wanted to show that they'd actually been able to achieve something and so they established what's known as the Ethnic Affairs Commission. The Ethnic Affairs Commission in theory sounds great, because what you're doing is you're actually having some kind of policy, a policy program that is supposed to influence government departments. Well, of course, very little of this was achieved, and the big clanger in all that, what I find disappointing, is in fact the Ethnic Affairs Commission hasn't really achieved those things that it should have been achieving. It hasn't actually done very much in

George GIANNOUPOULOS

terms of implementing and moving along in terms of the changes that have occurred. What has happened is we've become ingrained in the process more than the outcomes, and why I enjoyed working with Don Dunstan was that he was very much focused not only on the policy but on the outcomes. He wanted outcomes, he wanted things to actually happen; whereas the Ethnic Affairs Commission is more involved with a process than with an outcome. 'Forget about the outcome: let's have a review of a review of a review.' Well, we've had all these reviews and we've looked at the review of the review, and it just keeps going on and on and on. Now, you know, you're reinventing the wheel and the process becomes bigger and bigger and nothing actually happens, and so consequently I have very little faith in what is happening today, I have very little faith in the outcomes of a commission which has no teeth anyway. I mean, what is it in fact? It has no influence in government departments whatsoever. Now, some people might think I'm a bit critical of this, but they are the facts.

The facts are since we established at that time interpreting and translating services and made them work in both courts and health area, the information services that were actually in the Riverland, in Felixstow and in the city, and the programs here in Adelaide influencing government departments both in education and welfare. If one looks at the facts, the history, when the Ethnic Affairs Commission came on board, very little was actually done past that point. In fact, the services collapsed upon themselves. The big clanger was that when Don Dunstan and the whole vision went with him the subsequent administrations left it to the Ethnic Affairs Commission, but the Ethnic Affairs Commission has no teeth to actually go into a department and say, 'Look, we need to look at the situation.' They may talk about it, but very little is done. So if you're asking for a clanger, that's the biggest clanger, the fact that nothing has been achieved. And even today, I don't know that you can say – and I'm not criticising the people here, let me be very clear about this – I'm saying that the process of setting up an Ethnic Affairs Commission to be seen as though you're doing something may all look good but in fact has achieved very little in meaningful outcomes.

George GIANNOUPOULOS

Got to check that out. Just one last area: in observing how Don operated, how did you see him influencing the wider community in this area?

In the sense of his –

Getting them onside.

– getting them onside.

Yes.

He had an ability – and I'll give you an example in a moment – he had an ability to be able to zero in very quickly to what you're talking about. So if you're discussing with him, for example, a particular issue that a community was concerned about, he had the ability to grasp the big picture and he would have the ability to look at the big picture and say, 'Look, okay. I can see what you're driving at. Now, go and do the detail.' So he was very good at the big picture, he was very good at the concept of what you were on about. So if you were to say to him – in one particular case I remember discussing with him the idea of the shift that's going to occur when you get a new influx of migrants, and I was basically saying, 'Look, now we've got the majority of Italians and Greeks. Before that you had a different group. In the future you're actually going to get a greater Asian influence, and therefore we should be ready to be able to analyse and implement what is going on with this later group because the Italians and the Greeks and the European migration is sooner or later going to taper off', which it did, 'and then you're going to get a greater number from Asia – whether it's Vietnam, Cambodia and other places.' And I said, 'Well, you're going to get more – from the Middle East or from Africa – and therefore we should be considering where we're heading with that.' Immediately he picked up the picture and understood the concept of where I was heading and said, 'Yes. Provide the necessary services for where now we're finding, where the aged Greeks and Italians are going to reach the point where a lot of them are going to be in their old age and we should provide services for the aged, and then for the new migrants that are coming in from other parts we now need to do other things.' So he was able to grasp that very quickly, whereas somebody else, if you tried to explain that to them,

George GIANNOUPOULOS

would most probably look at it from an administrative point of view, and he was able to look at the human side. That's what I think made him different, that he was able to look at the human side more than an administrative straitjacket, so he was able to jump all that and get to the kernel of what you're talking about and say, 'Well, let's see what we can do with this.'

And the Anglo community, where do you ---?

Well, here again, the Anglo community in relation to what the Ethnic Affairs was doing, are you saying, or in relation to how Don saw the whole thing?

Well, you've got the ethnic, the non-English-speaking background communities doing their thing and on the side or around all of this you've got what I call the Anglo or –

That's right.

– broader community and they can either support all of this or ignore it or –

Ignore it, exactly.

– engage with it.

We had enormous debates about mainstream Australian society and the ethnic groups and there were many, many arguments that we had and discussions in relation to this. The issue is: how do you convince the majority of the population that what you're trying to achieve is actually beneficial to society? Often when we discussed this, (and I remember at one stage I was discussing it with Don) – he began talking about social justice, and he looked at it from a broader point of view. He was not just looking at it from the ethnic point of view, he was saying – “we're looking at it philosophically”, we were talking about equity, liberty, social justice, *et cetera*, and we were looking at a broader picture, and when you look at it from the broader picture you try and convince the society and you say, 'Well, what sort of society do you want? Do you want an unintelligent, base society, or do you want an enlightened society that welcomes diversity, that welcomes multiculturalism, that actually can see the contribution that is being made to a society?' And most

George GIANNOUPOULOS

societies in history, if we look at history, most societies that have had diversity have flourished, if you look at Toledo in the fourteenth and fifteenth century and you look at how the Moors, the Arabs came over, and while the rest of Europe was in the midst of the Dark Ages there was a flourishing of a renaissance which was happening in Toledo in Spain; when you look at Alexandria, established 300 or so BC² by Alexander the Great, and when you look at the multicultural society that occurred there for thousands of years; and you can cite example after example after example. Where a society has had diversity and has had the ability to absorb different cultures and religions and ideas, it's always flourished. I could include the recent migration experience of USA in the early 20th Century.

Yes.

Where a society has not had that ability, the society has actually gone backwards. So we'd have this sort of discussion with Don and he would look at it from the social justice point of view, he would look at it from the diversity point of view, he would look at it from the type of society that you wanted. Initially when we discussed this he saw this in the context of Australia being more of an open, a free society, a democratic society that you could have citizens enjoying all kinds of freedoms. So there was a general, bigger concept in what he was discussing, whereas later on others did not have that concept and the idea just never occurred to them. They'd never imagined that.

Did he talk about his Fiji days at all?

Yes, in certain I suppose unguarded moments he would discuss his background and he would say that he would have, for example, experiences where other societies that he'd come from had Indian, Fijian and Chinese. So his own personal experiences weren't actually just from a white, Anglo-Saxon background; in fact, his experiences were from a multicultural background and this actually helped him. I remember in one of the speeches he gave he was talking about the whole idea of his own personal background being more diverse, and I think some people got it and

² BC – before Christ (analogous to BCE – before Common Era).

George GIANNOUPOULOS

some people didn't get it. If you listened carefully, you understood what he was on about. But the strange thing about him was if you sat next to him he'd be very quiet. He wouldn't say much, he just sat there, and unless you started a conversation with him that had something in common to discuss he was just quiet.

Yes, so pretty hard to communicate.

Very hard. He'd just sit there and not say anything.

Did he ever talk about the classics, the Greek classics, at all?

Oh, he loved the Greek classics. He was into the culture of the Greek classics and the Roman, it was something he particularly had an interest in. We'd often discuss, I suppose, society at the time where Greece was at its height in terms of its civilisation, and the material that he was able to refer to was quite astounding.

Really?

Because I had a particular interest in it and I may read Aristotle, Socrates or I might read most of the early philosophers; but he actually had quite a wide knowledge of the subject and a particular interest in it, so he was actually quite informed about how ancient societies worked, in particular the classical societies such as Greece and Italy. Also he used to bring up examples, he'd often bring up an example and he'd say, 'Well, in this particular case Plato was talking about this.' And you'd say, 'Well, hang on; what was the issue?' And one of the issues that I remember clearly we were discussing at one stage – it was a function we were at – where we were discussing Socrates.

Got about two minutes.

'Socrates was talking to his students and he said to them, "Well, would you give every man a sword?"' – you know, the classic example – "Would you give every man a sword?" And his students said, "Well, of course: democracy, it's what you've got to do." And then Socrates would say, "Well, hang on a second. What if this guy's a madman, would you give him a sword?" That would throw a spanner in the works.' (laughter) 'What sort of society would you want? How would this society – – –?' And so we would often discuss these sorts of things –

George GIANNOUPOULOS

Interesting.

– as I said, in part and parcel of the ethnic affairs experience, *et cetera*. I found him to be more of an enlightened, a renaissance man, an enlightened person. That's the way I found him, anyway.

Great. Thanks very much, George. That was really good.

Thank you.

That's the end of the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW.