

**THE MITCHELL FAMILY**

by

**Harry Mitchell**

1. My grandfather from my father's side, Haralambos Mihalakakis (Harry Mitchell) came to Australia in 1903 from the tiny Greek island Kythera.

Initially settling in Sydney, he later moved to Warwick in Queensland and established a milk bar business in the township. Some years later he returned to Greece where he remained until his death in 1979 at the age of 105.

I do recall having met my grandfather on his holiday visit to Australia in 1960. His age at that time was just a "young" 86 and I well recall his good health and energy during his visit. I recall also the visit to Queensland that year with my grandfather, father and younger brother Terry and visits to Warwick and to my cousin's place in Brisbane.

2. My father, Michael, arrived in Sydney on board the Italian passenger ship "San Remo" in 1937. His passage to Australia was the direct result of a sponsorship by a Greek Wauchope resident, George Calopides, a family friend who owned a cafe business in the town.

Interestingly, the "San Remo" was later captured by the RAN in the Indian Ocean as a result of it being an Italian ship. Italy at that time was seen as an ally of Germany under the dictatorship of Mussolini and so, the ship was considered a potential threat in Australian waters.

3. My father was a carpenter. He learnt his trade in Kythera where he grew up. He was just 9 years old when he commenced his trade. But on coming to Australia, the world was still trying to get back to some normality after the depression and carpentry jobs at that time just weren't available. So Dad went to work in George Calopedis' cafe in Wauchope.
4. Dad stayed with the cafe for just 12 months as a result of the Calopedis family selling the business. Luckily, dad had a sister in Queanbeyan and was invited to Queanbeyan by his sister's husband, Nick Cassidy, to work in their cafe in Monaro Street, Queanbeyan. That cafe was known throughout the district as the Paragon Café. Dad worked in the shop by

---

day and slept in upstairs accommodation by night.

5. In 1939, another cafe came on the market in Queanbeyan. It was the Capitol Café and offered tough competition to the Paragon. Dad, with his brother-in-law Nick Cassidy, coaxed a third Queanbeyan Greek resident to form a partnership to buy the Capitol. They did so and it turned out to be a big success for the three.
6. It was at that time that my father's family name was changed. His solicitor at that time believed that the name Mihalakakis was too long and that it should be abbreviated. And so it was (reluctantly) and so today we have the family name of Mitchell.

Interestingly, the Queanbeyan solicitor's name was Maguire, the brother of the well known Wollongong solicitor Tommy Maguire.

7. My mother's family originated from the Greek village of Napoli located at the bottom of the Peleponese mainland. They emigrated to Australia in 1925 when my mother was just 9 months old. Upon arrival in Australia, the Damianaki family settled in Surrey Hills and later moved to Fairfield where the family remained until each of the children married and went their separate ways. The patriarchs of the family remained there until they died.
8. Interestingly, the Damianaki family's English translation was Diamond. I have many recollections of my Sydney grandparents and many fond memories. For example, my grandfather was a shooter. He had many guns and rifles and was often out in the bush enjoying his passion of hunting. Since then, of every family branch of the Diamond family, at least one of their grandchildren has followed my grandfather's passion. In my family it is my brother John. Probably a lot more well known is my first cousin, Michael Diamond, the Australia's Olympic Gold Medallist.
9. After leaving school, my Mum (Marie) worked in sales at the Mick Simmons store in George Street, Sydney. I recall when growing up how my mother often told me that she earned 5 pence a week. I always found that very hard to believe.
10. War broke out at the end of 1939 and my father was conscripted into the Army in 1941. Dad also saw regular active service in the Greek

Air Force prior to coming to Australia. In the Australian Army, dad was responsible for the loading of transport units in Sydney. He earned the rank of Sergeant in our Army. That was something Dad was always quite proud of.

11. Dad was released from the Army in 1945 at the end of the war. Prior to his release he had met my mother at a dance at the Paddington Town Hall. After a period of courting they became engaged and married in 1945 just before his discharge from the Army.
12. Two weeks after his discharge Dad noticed an ad in the Sydney Morning Herald for a milk bar in Wollongong. Mum and Dad visited Wollongong soon after, saw the shop and thought they could make a go of it. He often tells the story of how much the shop was run down when they first saw it. Also the fact that the footpath on Keira Street was dirt and how much of that used to finish up in the shop.

The shop was leasehold only, the building belonged to Mr and Mrs James who lived upstairs.

13. The shop gave Mum and Dad an identity in the City. Everyone came to know them as a result of the shop. The Crown Theatre, a marvellous old picture show, was the catalyst for bringing people to the milk bar.
14. I remember so well the many occasions of having spent time as a young fellow serving in the shop. Even I got to know so many people from those days of the 50s and 60s and in fact, still see many of them today.
15. Mum and Dad settled in Keira Street at a site now taken by the Keira Street Car Park. Three children were born into the Mitchell household - all boys. I, being the eldest, was born in 1949. Brother Terry was born in 1951 and baby John in 1956.
16. In 1953 the family moved from the Keira Street residence to another one on Smiths Hill in Kembla Street.
17. Many happy memories can be recounted from our time at the shop and Kembla Street. I recall school holidays when cousins from Queanbeyan and Liverpool came down and stayed with us. I recall knowing all the staff of the Crown Theatre and getting into the pictures for nothing.

I remember with fondness my Dad's beautiful 1941 Buick and the appeal that car had in town.

18. The City CBD was my domain. I knew where all of the shops were. I did the banking for my parents' shop at the National Bank near where Grace Bros now is. When Dad needed eggs he'd send me to Buttles grocery shop where the Medical centre now is in Crown Street. If he needed bulk cheese, he'd send me to PDS in Keira Street where the parking station now stands. So many many memories.
19. In 1968 Dad was given notice that the shop site had been sold and that he would have to close the shop down. I suppose that with the closure of the Crown Theatre a couple of years earlier, the decision to close up wasn't all that hard for Mum and Dad as it was really the theatre that kept it going most of the time.
20. So 1968 saw the closure of the Mitchell Café or milk bar. A period of post war business community history in Wollongong was no more.
21. Memories:  
Shop was the after school meeting place.  
Music career virtually started there.  
I still deal with people in the community whom I knew from the shop - Laurie Kelly, John Parsons even Ted Murphy, etc.(but don't tell anybody Meg!!)
22. Dad was always a people person. After the shop he drove taxis from 1968 till 1987. He loved his taxi work.  
Even today, if I need to go somewhere in the City he will tell me exactly where the place is. Mum went into retirement and became pretty much a recluse. Today they continue to enjoy each other, their children and good health. Dad will be 90 in a couple of weeks and Mum will be 78 next week.
23. Today, I live in Kiama and am married for the second time. I have three children from my first marriage and a new baby from my wife of five years.

AND SO THE MITCHELL NAME LIVES ON.....