

NICK'S CAFÉ – 72 CROWN ST, WOLLONGONG

By Joanna Christodoulou

In 1960 my parents, Chris and Angela Kinezos sold the family home in Kensington, Sydney and bought Nick's Café and moved all the family to Wollongong, all 10 of us! I was the oldest of all the kids, 20 years of age and the youngest was 6 months old. We all lived in the 4 bedroom residence above Nick's Café and worked downstairs.

Nick's Café (now listed as a heritage building) was located between three pubs, The Harp, The Oxford and The Wollongong (now demolished was opposite the Town Hall).

Nick's Café in the '60s and '70s was a very busy and a very popular shop, open 7 days a week from 7 o'clock in the morning before breakfast and closed 11 o'clock at night. To open at 7 in the morning work had to start at 4am. My parents had to employ 2 cooks and several other people, such as waitresses, people washing dishes and cleaners, all of whom were on shift work. Between the family and the employees about 18 people worked in the café day after day. In Nick's Café, with its friendly staff, the nice environment and the large variety of food, people could enjoy a nice meal. Lobster, oysters, schnapper, bream or grilled flounder always served with fresh salad and chips were very popular in

summer time. The workers used to love the big T-bone and rump steaks, the mixed grill, crumbed cutlets and others, always served with three vegetables and chips. Also very popular were the roasts – pork, beef, lamb or chicken and the big chicken Maryland dishes, served with baked vegies.

People used to enjoy the variety of soft drinks, milkshakes, ice-creams, chocolates and many more goodies from the milk bar section. Nick's Café was one of the first, if not the first to install an espresso machine in Wollongong. I remember on weekends, one of us had to make cappuccinos, Vienna Coffees, long and short espressos for hours.

In the 12 years we operated Nick's Café we served thousands and thousands of people from all walks of life. Our regular customers were steelworkers, wharfies, bus drivers and 3 or 4 buses of tourists used to come in every week. Summer time we used to get all the surfies who came to Wollongong for the surf carnivals. On weekends a lot of families, mostly local people who went out for a family dinner. Even the Lord Mayor Tony Bevan would come in for lunch some times.

I remember my parents had faced a lot of problems and were under a lot of pressure from the big responsibility of running a business, dealing with staff and taking care of such a big family, the biggest problem for them was language. My brothers, sister and myself were very young and inexperienced, but we tried so hard to help mum and dad.

During those years we met a lot of lovely people. People who helped us and gave us advice, we made friends we still communicate with today, but we also met some scums, who made our lives a living hell. I remember a lot of racist people were around in the open in those times, racism was blooming, we were so young and naive, we could not understand why people had to be so mean and cruel, they used to give us so much trouble. It was impossible for us to face and battle racism alone, we needed some protection & protection came at a price from the police. Free dinners on a regular basis for officers and their families. Big platters of seafood and platters of roasts with salad and chips were sent to the Police Station on a regular basis too. That was something that used to make me very upset and agitated but we needed protection and that was the price we had to pay for years.

Running Nick's Café for 12 years, I learned a lot, and gained a lot of experience about family, social issues, how to deal with people and problems, about relationships & generally what life is all about. Unfortunately the bad memories are still with me, as much as I would like to forget them I can't. The good memories of those years – are the lovely people I met and the beautiful friendships I made.