

Title: Interview with Demos Demosthenous

Date: Feb, 12th 1982.

Location: Sault Ste. Marie, Canada

Greek American

START OF INTERVIEW

Interviewer (I): [Tape cuts in in middle of sentence] ...I'd forgotten that I lost the first part of my conversation with Father Chris, so...Then did you come here from Greece?

Demos Demosthenous (DD): I arrived Canada in 1970, September of 1970. I came by boat obviously, as everybody else, I suppose, comes into this country as a foreigner. We landed in Halifax and then lived in Toronto for five years, after I started my career with Holiday Inn, so 1973, '74 I'd been transferred to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, again. So the first time I stayed in Sault Ste. Marie was between October 1974 and February 1977. I got transferred in 1977, February the 15th to Kingston, Ontario, again with the company I'm present employed. From Kingston, I got transferred to Brantford, Ontario and then three years exactly later, February the 15th again, 1980 I returned back to Sault Ste. Marie as the manager of the Holiday Inn.

I: Were there Greek Communities? Greek Orthodox churches in these other communities where you lived?

DD: In every community I lived, yeah, there was a Greek community and obviously they have their own church and schools and they really live together, yeah.

I: That's interesting, I didn't expect that. And you said you came from the island of Cyprus.

DD: That's right.

I: How old were you when you came?

DD: I was 21 when I came to Canada, couldn't speak a word of English. I was actually very lucky because I could live with my parents and my sisters which they lived already in Canada for

quite a few years before I arrived, I was the last one of the family to come over, for the simple reason that the Cyprus government could not let me go unless if I had to join the National Guard which was, I was a sergeant major for two years in the army in Cyprus, as you probably know we have the war between the Greek Cypriots and Turkey Cypriots since 1963. So I had to join the National Guard for two years and after I got out of the army, I came to Canada in 1970, September of 1970.

I: Why did your family come Canada?

DD: Actually, my oldest sister was the one who made the first move with her fiancé. They came over to Canada and then one by one, we came over mainly because of political reasons and war reasons.

I: Understandable, you'd rather not _____

DD: No, when my older sister came to Canada, as I said, and she got married. Obviously she delivered the first baby so she needed somebody, obviously, to look after baby while both were working to survive in this country, and so my father, my mother, my youngest sister came over to Canada and I was the last one, as I said, of the regime [?] to come over in 1970. We all lived in one house initially when we came to this country until we start branching around and starting careers in this country, but the Greek blood [?] is always there and is always gonna be always there, I suppose. And that's about it, I guess, I can't remember anything else right now.

I: Is your family still in Toronto?

DD: Yes. My father and mother live in Toronto, my youngest sister lives in Toronto. The ironic situation is that my older sister, who brought everybody to Canada, is living back home right now. [Laughs] She left in 1978 and she opened up her own business, actually, she's got an old age home and funeral home together and she's doing tremendously well. But here is the reason we are in Canada, and she's back home and everybody else is in Canada right now.

I: Is she in Cyprus now?

DD: Yes, she is in Cyprus, she is in the island of Cyprus and she's doing really, really well. Actually she was a supervisor at an old age home in Toronto with a hospital on Wellesley [?] Street, where she worked for 12 years with elders and she's done really, really well in Canada.

But getting to know the experience of the Canadian culture and the experience of the Canadian ways of living, she took advantage of it, she put a lot of stuff from Canada, like beds and wheelchairs and what have you, which she brought back home and she set up in old age home, which is a very, very good one and also she built first funeral home in Cyprus which they never even dreamed of having a service and such with a funeral home.

I: Having a what?

DD: A service. Having a funeral home very similar to ones we have in this country.

I: Oh, service such as a funeral home, that was what I didn't get. And when you lived in the Sault before, did you, were you then a member of St. George's at that time?

DD: Yes, I was. Yes, I was. I arrived here in October of 1974.

I: And you were working here for the Holiday Inn?

DD: I was working at the Holiday Inn.

I: And what was your job?

DD: I was the catering manager in Sault Ste. Marie Holiday Inn. Then in May of 1975, I must have been doing something really well because I got promoted to assistant manager in this, in the very same hotel, and then in February of '77, I got transferred to Kingston, Ontario.

I: And were you a chanter at St. George's at that time, too?

DD: No, I wasn't, in fact. It was somebody else who fortunately had to, or fortunately for him, I suppose, he had to go back home, he was a Greek from the mainland of Greece and when I came back actually, the church was, I can't say falling apart but they didn't have really the criteria and the element to really let it go ahead with it, so I stepped in and I said I can help out and we took from there and it's doing really well now.

I: Had you done any chanting before? Or, I mean, how did you happen to, you know?

DD: Very limited in Kingston, Ontario with the Greek community again. A lot of people now and again they say do me, "How did a young fellow like you become a general manager of the Holiday Inn?" And I remember when I first arrived in Canada, well, almost 11 years ago, well it is 11 years ago, I couldn't speak a word of English. Not one word of English and I have never

ever been to Canadian school to learn the language, not one word. Yeah, I'm a self-taught person, I suppose, after all I started a career out with Holiday Inn, they sent me to university in '76 and 1980, I did my courses on management. But that was the extent of my schooling in this country. [Talking to someone else in the background about taking messages on the telephone that has been ringing] Ok, what do you want to know?

I: I was just looking to see which university...

DD: Yeah, I attended Holiday Inn University in Memphis, Tennessee.

I: Oh, it's, they have their own, I see.

DD: Yeah. The Holiday Inn organization is such the system, they have a little over 1,800 hotels worldwide, so they have their own university.

I: You were in the top 180, I see.

DD: I was one of top 10 percent hotels in the world, yes. In fact, it's very ironic, but I was the only Canadian in my class. And I placed seventh in the class, you know, with, even with my language barrier, or terminology barrier, whatever you want, any way you want to put it.

I: Tell me something about the Greek community of Sault, Ontario.

DD: In Sault, Ontario, ok, in Sault, Ontario, we're a very small community as you are aware of, we're just about a little over 40 families. Very active though, very active community together. We just organized the Greek school again, so they will be starting teaching the Greek language to our kids in Sault, Ontario, every Saturday from now on.

I: Where will that be?

DD: That will be one of the public schools in the city, they are donating us one of their rooms at the school so we can use it ostensibly [?] or our kids.

I: And who will teach?

DD: That I'm not quite sure yet. I have been approached but I don't know if I can, if I'll have the time to be away from my work. If I can help out any way, I definitely will. As I said, the Greek community is trying really hard to survive with the small number we are, in church as well, the members of the church are very limited as you know. We have a lot of Greek dances and we

have a lot of functions where we put together ourselves and there is some money for the Greek community for the orphans of the city. Like, for instance, right after Christmas, I think it was January, we had a sort of a bake sale at the hall of the great church and with a number of thirty-some families, we raised more than 850 dollars for the orphans of the area. So we are really active for the amount of people we are in the area. I would like to see it even more progressive in a lot of ways but obviously everybody is looking for himself to go to work and come back home and being tired is the _____ from Algoma Steel Corporation we don't expect too much from _____ people are _____ I guess. What else can I say about the Greek community?

I: I guess most of the Greeks here came from Greece, is that correct?

DD: Yes, they did. Yes, they did. A number of them came from Rhode Island.

I: The Isle of Rhodes?

DD: The Isle of Rhodes. Quite a few from the mainland and actually we're only, I think we're the only Greek Cypriot family here. The Greek community is involved with the _____ or, would you say, a multi-cultural event in the city. What that is all about, actually, all the cultures in the city, all the ethnic groups, they get together once a year and they expose their foods and their dances and so on and so forth and even with a small number of the Greek community, we're still heavily involved in that.

I: When is it?

DD: Last year it was in September. This year it has not been decided yet, but I do presume it will be around the fall, again September.

I: Is it part of the fall festival?

DD: Nope, not at all. This is just strictly for the ethnic groups of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

I: Do most of the Greeks work at the steel plant, is that correct, the fathers, the husbands?

DD: 95% of them do, yes. We have a few businessmen in the city, they own the submarine [?] restaurants and, what else, there's some _____ shops, well, myself again, I'm not in the steel plant, as you know.

I: How did they happen to come, how did the Greeks and steel plant get together, then?

DD: How did the Greeks and the steel plant get together?

I: Yeah. How is it that the Greeks came and they're working at the -

DD: It's a very, very hard-working nation. It's a hard-working nation. The good part about it is that where they come from they know what a dollar means and hard work doesn't really bother them at all. They are out there and I have to give them a lot of credit, I can't do that but nevertheless I'm not after money by any means, but I have to give them a lot of credit because they leave their homes, their homelands and their village, their traditions, their, a lot of things, to come over and they're really working hard to build some kind of so-called security, or financial security I should say, as far as they are concerned because they have been through wars and they have been through depressions, which you people so fortunately have never been through, and they know what the dollar value, and they know what a depression means. They know what a war means. Most of them lived through the 1940s, where the, during the Second World War, I myself lived through wars in Cyprus, and I'm not that old. We had the war in '55 - '60, '55 - '59, actually, against Great Britain and then we had the war from 1963, which is still going on, amongst the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots, which I participated in that, too. So we know practically what... what money's all about and we learned to respect it and everybody is working hard to pretty well establish themselves in, as I said, and set themselves pretty well financially. Not me of course. I can never do that. I can never save money. [Laughter]

I: Well, I was just wondering because over in the Sault, Michigan, you know, back around, you know, 80 years ago, the Greeks were working at the tannery and then other Greeks heard about it through newspaper ads and through word of mouth, and that was how they came and worked at the tannery, and then, usually then as soon as they could they would leave the tannery and open a restaurant or something, but I'm just wondering if it was something like that here with Algoma Steel where one Greek started and then the word went back or...

DD: It could be, it could be, I'm not really in a position to give my opinion on that, but I do suppose every nationality coming to Canada or United States, whatever the case may be, first they gotta, as they go, the old English saying goes "Birds of a feather flock together." I do suppose that first thing they are reaching out the areas to find one of a kind, you know, _____, and just maybe one helps, they help each other in a sense to get a job, and Algoma Steel being one of the major, *the* major industry of the city, obviously, and the best well-paid I

suppose, in regards of hourly salaries. They try to get in there and obviously they try to get their friends as well.

I: Ok. Tell me about their relationship between the Greeks in Sault, Michigan and Sault, Ontario.

DD: Oh, the relationship between the Greeks of the two communities, Sault, Ontario and Sault, Michigan, is just great, you know, we don't, we get along great and we never really have the distinction of the Sault, Michigan and the Sault, Ontario, we never say, well, you're Yankees or Americans or whatever the case may be, or you're Cannucks or Canadians, no, thank God this, this distinction, it is not there whatsoever, we're looking at ourselves as a Greek Community and that's the way we want it to be. We're really just like a big family. Obviously we have our ups and downs like everybody else has and every other nationality in this world, but no, generally speaking, we're getting along great, the Greeks from Michigan and Ontario, we're just, you can see it in every function we have, you know, there's no sort of thing that, "Oh, you're from the United States, oh, I'm from Canada." Not at all.

I: That's nice. Ok. You mention Father Meletios [?] stopping in here once or twice a week, want to talk about him a little bit?

DD: [laughs] If I had time, I can speak to you about that man for the next six years consecutively. The man is dynamic, tremendous, he left Cyprus when he was a very young lad on a mission in Africa, he lived in Africa for 35 years, he built schools in Africa, he helped tremendously a big number of Greeks in Africa, very extensively, and when they were kicked out from...if my memory serves me right he was in Congo at the time, came to the United States because his immediate family, which consists of just sister I suppose, married with her grandkids, lived in New York, so he decided to come to his sister in the United States. But the man is just remarkable, the things he's done in his life. He was millionaire over three, four times and he lost every penny of it. Many times, over and over again. In 1973, he went to Cyprus for the first time after some like 55, 56 years, and his sister convinced him to buy a house on the East coast of the island. And in 1974, he lost even that one again because the Turkish Cypriots and – no, not the Turkish Cypriots, actually, the Turkish from Turkey, from the mainland, when they invaded [?] in 1974 together. So his savings for 12 years in the Greek Church of Sault, Michigan went directly to the house in Cyprus where he wanted to, it was his dream to die where he was born. He even lost that too, and when I asked him, "What's your feelings about these

situations?” He always said, “Well, God never wanted me to have any money, I don’t have any.” [Laughs] He’s a very, he has a tremendous sense of humor, you know, I don’t know exactly his age, but I would say, he is of late 70s, easily. And he’s got a tremendous sense of humor and tremendous responsibility on his shoulders. He just brought a Canadian fellow, Father Chris, who, he was teaching, he was telling me today, in fact, of three, four years consecutively, the Greek Orthodox religion and the Greek liturgy and the man was just ordained a few weeks ago to a Greek priest, you know, and I think that’s tremendous, that’s tremendous, a man of his age. He has been through a lot of things in his life, he has been through a lot of operations in his life. In fact, he had an operation a few months ago on a Monday, and I visited that the man on a Thursday because I was extremely busy in between those days, and I went to the hospital, he had a very serious operation, and I went to the hospital, at the hospital to visit him on a Thursday, and I found him walking everywhere by himself, I said “What in Heaven are you doing?” He says, “Well, I just can’t lay in bed and don’t be useful so I just got up and I started walking around.” He’s incredible, he’s incredible, and the whole community really loves him, really loves him. He’s, as I said, late 70s and a man of his age, he’s going to Sudbury [?], he’s going to C_____ City [?], in every community around the area from Upper Peninsula, Michigan Peninsula to Sudbury, Wawa, in all the Greek communities and he’s performing in churches and he’s talking to the Greeks and he’s inspiring pretty well everybody in this part of the world.

I: And he doesn’t drive, does he?

DD: No, he doesn’t drive at all. He doesn’t want a car, he says. But it’s amazing at his age, for instance, Christmas and Easter, which they’re, the Greeks are really celebrating those two events and he’s performing midnight at the church of Saint George across the river in Sault, Michigan and right after the service he leaves here to go to Sudbury for another service, and in my opinion, that’s remarkable for a man of his age.

I: And he speaks very little English.

DD: Very little English, yeah, very little. But he’s tremendous, he’s very dynamic, a very dynamic man. I wish I could do things that he’s done in his life. Obviously not. Or maybe... [Laughs]

I: Yeah, I couldn't understand how he could get, you know, all around like that, without English, without a car in tow, I've heard about his, you know, that he'd been a missionary in Africa, and I thought, well, I guess, you know, if he has what it takes to get through the -

DD: He was driving, he had his cars in Africa.

I: Oh, oh, he -

DD: Oh yeah, oh no, in fact -

I: He does know how to drive then?

DD: He still has a license, believe or not, so obviously nobody would let him drive, but oh, no, he had his cars in Africa. As I said, he was a millionaire many times and lost his money all the time. When he came to the United States, he was offered a job from the bishop of North America as...I don't know what the terminology is, but as first priest of _____ in one of the biggest communities in New Jersey and New York and he flatly refused it because he doesn't want to, he's not a flashy man by any means, he's done what he had to do in his life and he just wanted a small community where he can love the people and people can love him and respect him for what he is. It's very ironic because here is a man who, as I said many times already and I sound like broken a record, he has been a millionaire so many times in his life but yet, he has got absolutely nothing except with his very limited salary he gets from the Greek Church of North America. And he doesn't want anymore, he never asked for a raise, he's never after money, he never goes after money, he performs a lot of services where most of the priests that I know require money and the man, he never asked for a penny, and that's again something very remarkable on his part. We love him. We love him.

I: How did he get to be a millionaire?

DD: Well, in Africa, when he was a missionary, he built a lot of schools, he built a lot of Greek Communities he put together and in return, the governments of the countries he visited, they had given him a lot of land where himself and the people down there who respected him and helping him out, he turned them into coffee planters and tea planters and a lot of other things where he was exporting everything, helping out the Greek community himself and slowly, slowly he became a millionaire twice and he lost every penny of it twice, in fact coming to the United

States, he was coming to the United States with a lot of money, Belgian francs, by the time he arrived to United States, or what he told me, he was coming to the United States with a little over two million dollars' worth of Belgian francs and by the time he arrived in the United States by boat the two million dollar francs were worth a little over 12,000 dollars because of the change of the government _____. No, he, but I want to tell you that he's just a dynamic man, he's incredible, he's incredible. He has stories to tell you that'll really get you going for hours and hours and hours and you never want to leave your chair because everything he says is so interesting you want to know what happened next.

I: Give me some ideas of what to ask him when I get a chance to talk to him.

DD: What to ask him?

I: Yeah, what are some of his better stories, where should I, when I talk to him, what -

DD: You can ask him how did he, I suppose, how did he end up being in Africa in the first place? He was on his way to Australia. He was on his way to Australia, he ended up being in Africa. He was singing the patriarchs [?] in Alexandria in Egypt and from there on he became a missionary in Africa. You can ask him about those, those stories. You can ask about the stories of pulling together the Greeks in Africa, how many Greeks did he help in Africa? What was he representing in Africa? Because he was representing the entire Greek Nation in Africa. He was a very, very powerful man. He helped a lot of Greeks, a lot of Greeks, thousands of them, which he can tell you a lot stories about that, he can tell you stories how he built the schools and built the churches and put the Greek communities together and how did everybody became prosperous. He can give you a lot of stories.

I: I want to get back to the chanting for a minute, what you said about that made me think about you, so you were chanting in Hamilton, what, a little bit, that was where you - ?

DD: No, no, not in Hamilton. In Kingston.

I: In Kingston. Okay. How did you get started?

DD: OK, we had a choir Kingston where, actually I started a choir in Kingston, because when I arrived in Kingston in 1977, it was only a single man there and he did not really sound as good as having a choir in church. And I started a choir in Kingston, Ontario and we ended up being

some like 18 people, you know, the choir, it just sounded tremendous. So we started building up a crowd again back in church because they wanted come and hear the choir, obviously that's their own attitude, of going to church, but nevertheless, it was God's will, I suppose, to put the people there and put us there to sing and have these people there to come and hear us. So there was a purpose for it, too. And then we hired a person who was playing the organ in the church and the choir of the 18 people of us followed up, slowly, slowly and he was obviously a professional from Queen's University and he knew exactly what he was doing, which was one good part about it, and from one thing to the next, without noticing it, I started becoming a sort an expert in the Greek Community of, you know, and so when I came back to Sault Ste. Marie –

I: About music?

DD: Yeah. Obviously. When I came back to Sault Ste. Marie, and I went to church one Sunday with my family and it was just dead, you know, period. It really bothered me. So Father Meletios [?] asked me if I could help out and I said, delighted. We started slowly, slowly and the Greeks are coming back to church again, which is tremendous, in my opinion, to put them together again, because for a few years, not that they weren't together, they were together, but the feeling it wasn't there in the church and the service because they didn't have somebody there to listen to and the Greek liturgy is not the easiest of all because everything is through chant. Everything. With the exception of the Sunday prayer, everything else we have to chant for, and as I said, slowly, slowly, I started there, Father Meletios [?] taught me a lot of other things which I wasn't well aware of –

I: Like what, about –

DD: In regards to chanting and the Greek liturgy and we're doing really well, we're a good group, actually, there are only two Greek Cypriots here, him and myself.

I: I was thinking that, too, when you -

DD: So that's _____

I: Now, does, I was told that Betty P_____ [sounds like "Papadianis"]

DD: P_____? [sounds like "Papadianis"]

I: Yeah, does she, she does some chanting too?

DD: If I'm not there for, sometimes, my job takes me away from the city, for instance, Monday I'm going away for another week, which means the following Sunday won't be here, and if I'm not here and she's not working, obviously, she goes and will help out as well, which is, we're very thankful to her.

I: And she works here at the Holiday Inn?

DD: Yeah, she works at the Holiday Inn too, yeah.

I: Was she born on this side, do you know, or is she from the American side?

DD: No, she was not born in Canada. She came to Canada about 20-25 years ago.

I: But from Greece?

DD: No, she's from Rhodes.

I: Ok. Her aunt is Mrs. _____?

DD: Yes. Yes.

I: I'm getting the connections.

DD: It's amazing because most of the Greeks in this city, I found that they're some way or the other they're related, you know. Somebody's cousin to somebody else and nieces and nephews and what have you. It's pretty well a big family, pretty well a big family. And we're going to keep it that way, too.

I: And you're what?

DD: We're going to keep it that way, too. What else do you want to know, Mary?

I: What else have you got to say? Anything? I don't have any more questions.

END OF INTERVIEW