

My Life in Neret and Pemberton

By George Germanchev

With thanks to Lucy Rose

It's the early hours of Tuesday December 6th. It has been a hot, sticky night and I'm unable to sleep, so have decided to do something I have been putting off for some time; that is to try and record part of my life's history. It was never my intention to do so, but a year or two ago Vicki's family gave me a book for my birthday entitled "Dear Grandad, from you, to me", and inside it has headings such as: "tell me about the place you were born", "what were your earliest memories", "parents names, dates of birth, stories about them" etc. That has prompted me to do something about it, and since I have had limited schooling, and my writing is a bit shaky, I thought this might be the better option — to record this story orally.



I was born in Neret, Macedonia, a village also known as Polipotamos, which was the Greek version. Through most of this story there will be two versions of village names. I was born to Sofka and Kuzo Germanchev, known in Greek as Germantsos, and English as Germantse or Germanche. Sofka, my Mum, originally came from a nearby village called Bapchor, as I remember it, about a day's walk.

I was born at our home in the village of Neret, sometime in July 1936.

In the villages, you had a room where you could house your animals, something like a stable. This was the place where my Mum brought me into the world. I remember once hearing a story that Dad was out and Mum had to call for help during my birth. I had a grandparent, my grandmother (Dad's mother). I can't remember my Grandad, as I believe he had passed away before I was born. Baba would have been there helping Mum. I also had grandparents in Bapchor — I will talk about them later on.

My father first came to Australia in late 1920s, and became a British subject. When he returned back to Macedonia (I think it was around 1932), he wed my mother. I was born, as I said, sometime in July, 1936. There were no dates, no calendars, no birth certificates, so someone took a stab in the dark and put it down as the 9th of July. For convenience, we've stuck with that ever since. I believe things went in seasons, and my Aunty used to tell me it was that season, and July seemed to be about right, so I am 75 years of age at the time of recording this.



The Germanchev family home in Neret.

In early 1937, when I was about 6-8 months old, my father returned back to Australia. The plan was for Mother and I to follow him out when the documentation could be arranged. It somehow got delayed, and before long World War II broke out in Europe. That limited transportation of migrants from Europe to Australia. It wasn't until 1948, over ten years later, we were finally able to get the right documentation and papers, and Dad could afford to pay for our passage. We finally set sail for Australia sometime in late 1948. I believe it must have been December, as we arrived at Fremantle on the 5th of January 1949. By then, I was 12 and a half years old, and I saw my father for the first time (since being a young baby) on that day, the 5th January 1949.

Up until then, I was brought up by my mother on her own, as were many other children of my era. A lot of Macedonian men had dispersed to many parts of the world to work and try and send some sort of income home to their families. I'm not sure how that worked, as there were no banks — maybe money was sent by mail, which was very sparse, but we somehow survived.

My earliest memories are of the place where I was born. Neret was a beautiful hillside village with a river running through the middle. About halfway through the town, in the centre of the village, there was a village square where there used to be gatherings. That's where they had dances, and we as kids used to sit up on the hill and watch all this, and all

sorts of activities. The church was nearby. Neret was very pretty. It had poplar trees on the riverbanks, right through town, which really make the countryside look outstanding.



George Germanchev as a baby with his grandmother, Vasilitsa.

We lived at the edge of town, and the river was just down below us. I used to spend many hours at the river, with other kids, playing, hopping across it on rocks. The river was a big part of our lives. There used to be a flourmill above our place, and I spent countless hours looking at water turning the pedal wheel, in turn turning some huge stone wheels, grinding wheat into flour. I think the way the payment was conducted was that you would take your bags of wheat, and they would keep so many as the payment for grinding the rest of your wheat. We used to grow vegetables in the gardens. We didn't grow wheat, so Mum grew

cabbage, onions, leeks, garlic, strawberries, and beans, and they were what we lived off. We would buy the wheat or exchange some vegetables for the wheat and get the wheat ground.

We lived on very little, but we survived. It must have been hard, but good management by Mum and other women in the same situation as her, with their husbands away, as they brought up all the kids by themselves. This is something that has stuck in my mind. Although I think I have adapted very well to Australia, and I love Australia as my home, it's hard to let go of your place of birth. So when Vicki and Paul, and then later Vicki and some of the kids went back to visit Neret, it really meant a lot to me, and I hope they got some satisfaction out of that as well.



George as a young boy.

One of the other things that stuck in my mind was harvesting of the wheat. It was all done by hand, and there would be a row of people with sickles all working in cohesion. The wheat there grew a lot taller than it does here, and when they finished cutting it they would stack it together with stalks down the bottom, like a pyramid, to dry. When it dried they would thrash it — by that I mean they would get handfuls of it and just beat it on the ground. The seed would fall off and the other stuff became straw for the animals in winter. That really left an impression on me, because it was such a lot of hard work, but it was also spectacular because when it would finish drying, and after the thrashing, then they would sieve the wheat. For a start they would throw it up in the air then as it fell down the wind would take out the skin of the wheat, then they would sieve it and bag it and then get it milled. The hay cutting was equally as spectacular, but the men did this. They would work in rows, and I would watch them as they would cut the hay, then they would all stop and have a drink of water. They had a sharpening stone on their belts, they would give the saw a rub about every ten minutes and away they would go again.

In the village, not far from us, lived Aunty Ristana Mechkarov (Metskaris in Greek), my father's sister. She had four children, who were my first cousins — two girls and two boys. Jim, the older of the two boys, stepped on a mine in 1948, and was killed outright. That was a very sad chapter in our lives, to lose someone so close and that we knew so well. The other three are now here in Australia. Tom and Jim Mechkarov and I were very close. They used to spend a lot of time in our house. We used to fight, we used to play, we used to wrestle, we used to cry — the things kids would do. Tom is now in Perth with a family of his own and has done very well in business, and we catch up occasionally.

The only person that was lost in our family before Jim was my Baba/Nanna, and she died when I was very, very young, I can just remember it. That was possibly one of my earliest memories. Mum was out tending to the fields and Baba was laying on the floor. She asked me to come and lay with her and she cradled me. When Mum came home Baba was dead and I was still in her arms.

I mentioned Mum was out tending the fields. The fields were small holdings of gardens outside the village. You had your yard within your home, and you couldn't grow much there, so you had to look for water. We had a block at each end of the town, possibly an hour's walk either way. Those blocks used to be our vegetable gardens, and that's what we lived on. We had a donkey and a dog. The donkey was a man's best friend in those early years — they were your tractor, your form of transportation, and also your friend. Donkeys are very strong, intelligent and loyal beasts, and this was well known when they called them the "beast of the burden". I remember our donkey well — I used to help Mum cart chook manure out to these gardens, and it would carry two heavy bags of manure with me on top, and Mum would be leading it. He had to be put away at night, in the stable. You wouldn't leave an animal outside for fear of wolves getting to them. Our dog's name was Sharko, as I recall he was a type of husky. We used to tie up our dog during the day, and let him off at

night. One night he didn't return. We think the wolves got him. I missed him a lot and for days on end I cried about him — he was my pet, my mate.

Life was hard, but it was also fun growing up. We didn't have much to eat, but we survived somehow. We weren't the only ones in that position — I think most of Europe was in the same situation. In our gardens, we used to grow strawberries — almost commercially. In every house, in the yard, we would have a wood-fired oven, and Mum used to make bread in it. We also used to roast pumpkins and things in there. Roasted pumpkin in a wood-fired oven used to be really nice. I recall we used to have a huge storage box, because in Winter you couldn't go outside and make the bread. So everyone used to make the bread (probably in late Autumn) and have enough bread stored away for the Winter months. This was if you were lucky enough to have flour.

Mum seemed to manage — she was very hardworking, she used to be out every day gathering wood and tending to the garden, and she was also a beautiful knitter. She used to knit for other people and get payment in the form of food for her work.

In the village there was a church and a school. We used to attend to church most Sundays — it was a beautiful old building.

The school was very rarely used as a school, because it was occupied during the war at various times by both sides of the conflict. I can only remember going to school for very few days, and there we were taught Greek, not Macedonian. There was no Macedonian schooling; I don't remember any alphabet in Macedonian, only our dialogue. I had to walk to school from one end of the village to the other. Mum must have scraped and saved to have bought me a pair of shoes, and they looked a bit like what modern day Dunlop tennis shoes look like — just a very flat sole. She would have worked hard and saved a lot to get them for me, but I refused to wear them because they were white and I thought they would make me look like a girl. I cried and cried, but Mum insisted I wear them, so I put them on and walked a couple of hundred metres on the way to school, then took them off and hid them, and then put them back on on the way home, just to please Mum.

My other recollection of the school was of one particular night during the period after the Second World War had finished, when there was a civil war going on in Macedonia between the Greeks and the Partisans. We were on the edge of the village, and the school was at the other end. The school was occupied by some soldiers, and I'm not sure whether they were Greeks or Partisans. On this particular night there was a loud knocking at the door. We were petrified, Mum and I. We had a cellar — Mum hid me there and went and opened the door, and this soldier just stormed in. After a while Mum got me up from the cellar. I saw big sub-machine guns and rifles there, and I couldn't stop looking at them. Anyway, they wanted to go to the school, and they needed someone to lead them there. So they took me. It was in the middle of the night of course. I remember it well, Mum howled and begged for them not to take me, but they took me anyway. They made me walk ahead of them and lead them to

the school. This took some time in the dark, and it was a long walk. I would have been only six or seven, maybe a bit older. I'm sure Mum thought she'd seen me for the last time. I was walking along and for some reason thought I'd better start whistling, because when we got to the school I didn't want the soldiers to shoot at me, so I thought I'd better make some noise. Anyway, I never got shot, and they happened to be on the same side — (the people occupying the school and the soldiers that were with me). So they got together and let me go, and off I walked back home. A couple of hours later, Mum kept hugging me and kissing me and never let me go for the rest of the night. It must have been very stressful for her. For me it was just something I was asked to do, and I couldn't get out of it — anyway it all turned out okay in the end.

We worked and played, we lived from day to day, from daylight to darkness. At nightfall the light was provided by kerosene lamps, and the cooking was done in the kitchen-come-bedroom. Our home consisted of two rooms down below — one was the stable, the other was the kitchen and living room, and two rooms upstairs — one where Mum and I used to sleep. Up the top of the stairs there was a picture of the Virgin Mary. We used to ask for her blessing every time we'd walk up the stairs. Down below under the stairs was storage for the water. The water had to be carted from a pipe spring not far from our place. That spring used to be the meeting place for everyone. The water used to be carted in containers and stored in quite big jugs under the stairs. Because the water came from the spring, it was beautiful, fresh, cool water.

In Bapchor I had my grandparents' (my Mum's parents), and Mum's siblings. Bapchor was about a day's walk. I remember my Uncle Chris came to Neret and took me back to Bapchor on his horse when I was very little. Approximately halfway there he stopped to fill the canteen with water. The horse had a drink, and I was still mounted. The horse bolted, and I hung on for dear life. I was eventually thrown off, but the horse stopped nearby. Uncle Chris eventually caught up to us and we continued on with the journey to Bapchor, where I met my grandparents and all my cousins. They were the Koios's, who are located in Perth now. I am very close with my Bapchor cousins. As I was an only child, my Koios cousins meant a lot to me, and still do, although we don't see nearly enough of each other and some have passed on.

There were no clocks, or any timepiece, so we weren't aware of dates or times. We just made ends meet and lived day to day. It wasn't until I was about eight or nine years old, while the civil war was still going on, that my Mother's home village of Bapchor was bombed out. This was a very sad chapter. The people had to evacuate and we thought our village, Neret, would meet the same fate, so we all relocated. We went to the Greek section — we had some relatives there in a place called Lerin, or Florina as we now know it. A lot of the Bapchorians went north and finished up in Czechoslovakia, and families were separated.

When we moved to Lerin, we loaded everything on our poor little donkey. We had distant relatives that we went to live with. We had to abandon our home and everything that went

with it to start a new life in Lerin, the Greek part of Macedonia. It was occupied by Greek soldiers, Greek police, Greek schools, everything Greek. I commenced my Greek schooling there. From where we were living it wasn't very far. This was my first attempt at serious schooling. I went to school there for about two years. Each morning, as the bombing was still going on, I would wake up and wonder if the school was still standing — sometimes I would wish it wasn't. I think every child has moments like that, where you get sick of the routine of school. I had to learn Greek, and while Greek and Macedonian seem to have some of the same customs, the languages are as far away from each other as Chinese and English. So it was very difficult to learn to speak Greek, then write and read Greek, but I was a reasonably fast learner and I coped well. By the time I came to Australia I could read, write and speak Greek fluently, but now — some 60 years on, because I haven't spoken Greek to anyone, I have just about forgotten everything — not that it worries me much. Naturally our family speaks Macedonian when we get together with cousins, aunts and uncles.

The people we lived with in Lerin had fields out of town, and they had two bullocks and a cart. They used to use these as transport to cart manure out to the fields and bring stuff back in. They taught me how to drive the bullocks with the cart, and that was my job when I wasn't at school. I remember that fondly, because we'd do it together with other kids and everybody was in the same situation. I remember one occasion we had to cross a river. Although it was knee deep and the bullock teams would usually drag the cart through comfortably, on occasions the snow would melt in the mountains, and the rivers would flood without warning. There were trees and logs and things floating down there, and it was a very dangerous situation. You had to stay on the other side of the river until it dropped off, which might take days. I remember unhitching the cart and hopping on one of the bullocks. He swam across, and the other one followed. We got safely across, and I rode the bullock back to Lerin. It was to everyone's surprise when we got home and the rest of the kids were still stuck on the other side. I don't know what made me take that chance or think of doing that, but the bullocks seemed to know where home was and they got me home safely.

This story about the bullocks reminds me of another early episode in my life, back at the village. From a very early age, I can remember that a lot of us kids used to tend to the herds. The herds consisted of cattle, goats and a few sheep. Most of the animals were housed in the confinements of the homes, or in the yards, so each day from dawn to dusk in the three seasons of Spring, Summer and Autumn, we the kids would tend to the herds — that is take them out to the fields and make sure they didn't stray into people's gardens, and then bring them home in the evening and take them to their respective homes. I was in charge of a small herd of cattle that belonged to some people not far from us, and I used to go and get them in the morning and take them out all day. We would all be together, and it was a good time for the kids. I can't remember what we did for food — our Mothers must have packed something for us, but I can remember just spending days at waterholes with the cattle just grazing. Amongst my herd there were two crazy cows that used to spook at anything. I used

to spend hours chasing them, crying, beating the ground, getting up, and chasing them again to bring them back. On this particular day, they were at a waterhole and there was a bee-type insect that used to sting them. Two of them bolted, and I ran after them, cried, and brought them back some time later. To make sure they wouldn't take off again, I tied their tails together. I did an old Granny knot — somehow managed to maneuver them together side by side and tie their tails together. Then the next time one of them got bit, it took off. I remember we were on quite a steep hill, and it went downhill dragging the other one behind, and snapping its tail right off at the butt. Eventually I caught up with them, undid the broken piece of tail — it had severed at the knuckle, there wasn't much blood. I stuck it inside my shirt and we went home. I normally would take the cattle back to their owners and then walk back home, but as we had to go past our house, I let them go on their own — I was petrified as to how this was going to turn out. I didn't tell Mum anything, went to bed, got off to sleep ok, because I would have been tired. In the morning, I heard a commotion. The owners of the cattle were in the yard yelling at Mum and wanting answers, and I woke up and still had the tail tucked inside my shirt. I then had to explain to Mum what had happened. Needless to say, I lost my job. That deprived our payments for the year, which was one bag of wheat for looking after the cattle. It's humorous now, but back then it was quite a stressful episode.

During the war, when we were doing all these things out in the field, we also had some good times. I can remember laying on our backs looking at the skies. We were just mountain kids, we knew nothing of life outside of the village, and we could hear the droning of planes. We didn't know what a plane looked like until then. We would be lying on our backs and there would be a formation of planes — you would hear them long before you could see them. In summer time in Macedonia it was just clear blue skies, and then you could see the sky black with formations of planes going one way, then they would return, and we would hear the droning and the noise, and again look up and lay on our backs and look at them — that was the best way to see them. On other occasions, they would go the other way, and return. It wasn't until I started to get an education in Australia when I learnt some history and knew more about the war, that I realized that it must have been the English and the Germans.

During the German occupation, the Germans came through Macedonia, but I don't remember anything bad about that. They were the frontline soldiers, and they left bread with us in exchange for strawberries, and then just moved on. It wasn't the SS, who had the bad reputation.

Occasionally I used to be by myself, and I remember walking out of the village going one way. I must have been going to one of the two blocks where Mum was tending to the garden, and on the other side of the river there was a young couple. The girl was known to us, I think her parents might have been my Godparents. I must have been giving this young couple a bit of lip, as she called me over, or they coaxed me to go across, and the young fella with her took to me. They lured me to go across and then I remember he picked me up

above his head and then slammed me to the ground several times and left me there. I was battered and bruised, and in a sad state, but I didn't have anything broken so I limped and crawled home. When Mum saw me she was angry and cried, but there was very little she could do. I was hurt, and I limped for a long time, but anyway I came good. Years later when we were in Australia, while Mum was still alive in Manjimup, the subject came up, and I found out that that fellow was living in Melbourne. I had it in my head that I wanted revenge, so I was determined to go to Melbourne and sort him out! But Mum begged me not to do it and so I tried to forget all about it.

So during the wars, both the Second World War and the Civil War, we could hear the never-ending gunfire in the distance, and sometimes quite close by — the cannons, and the constant chatter of machine guns. We just seemed to get used to it; it just became part of the background noise, but when you think about what it did to the people at the other end of the firing line, it's just a really sad episode of the war.

When Bapchor was bombed, my Koios cousins and my Marginis cousins fled north to Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Because of the Iron Curtain, they weren't able to come to Australia until about 1954, about five years after we came. People who went down south, into the Greek sector, seemed to be able to come to Australia much earlier. In Bapchor my Mother had her sister, Aunty Ristana Marginis, my Uncle Chris (Dedo Risto) and all my cousins. Uncle Nick and Uncle Norm were in Australia. Uncle Norm, when I came to know him, was a lovely, gentle man, who worked on the farm at Yanmah on his own. For a period we lived at Donnelly River Mill and I used to pushbike to him on weekends and help him with the tobacco plantation and on his potato patch. All of his children came over and they all eventually relocated to Perth.

In 1948, Mum and I were finally able to come to Australia, along with many others. We assembled at different areas in Lerin and a bus picked us up. We proceeded to travel down to Salonika (or Thessaloniki as it is known) to board a small merchant ship to take us down to a port near Athens. We eventually got to Salonika, to the port. Salonika was the Macedonian capital — there is a magnificent statue of Alexander the Great and a Macedonian museum, which is well worth visiting for any descendents of any Macedonian family. Bernice and I visited this in 1985, and it was quite an experience.

As we got into view of Salonika, I remember seeing the port, and it was my first ever glimpse, at age 12, of any sea or ocean. We stayed overnight and boarded this small merchant ship and proceeded down to Piraeus, then to Athens for a couple of days. We took some photos in front of the Greek Royal Palace. From there we boarded another ship and went to Cyprus. At Cyprus we disembarked just on dark and hopped in two or three taxis, which seemed to drive forever to get us to the place we were staying. I remember it was a double storey building. When we got up in the morning, we thought it must have been a long way to where we were staying, but we could see the wharf where we got off the ship. The Cyprian taxi driver had driven us all around the place on the pretense that it

was a long way. Nobody had much money, and the little bit we had was certainly wasted on this trip — we could have walked to our rooms if we had known where they were.



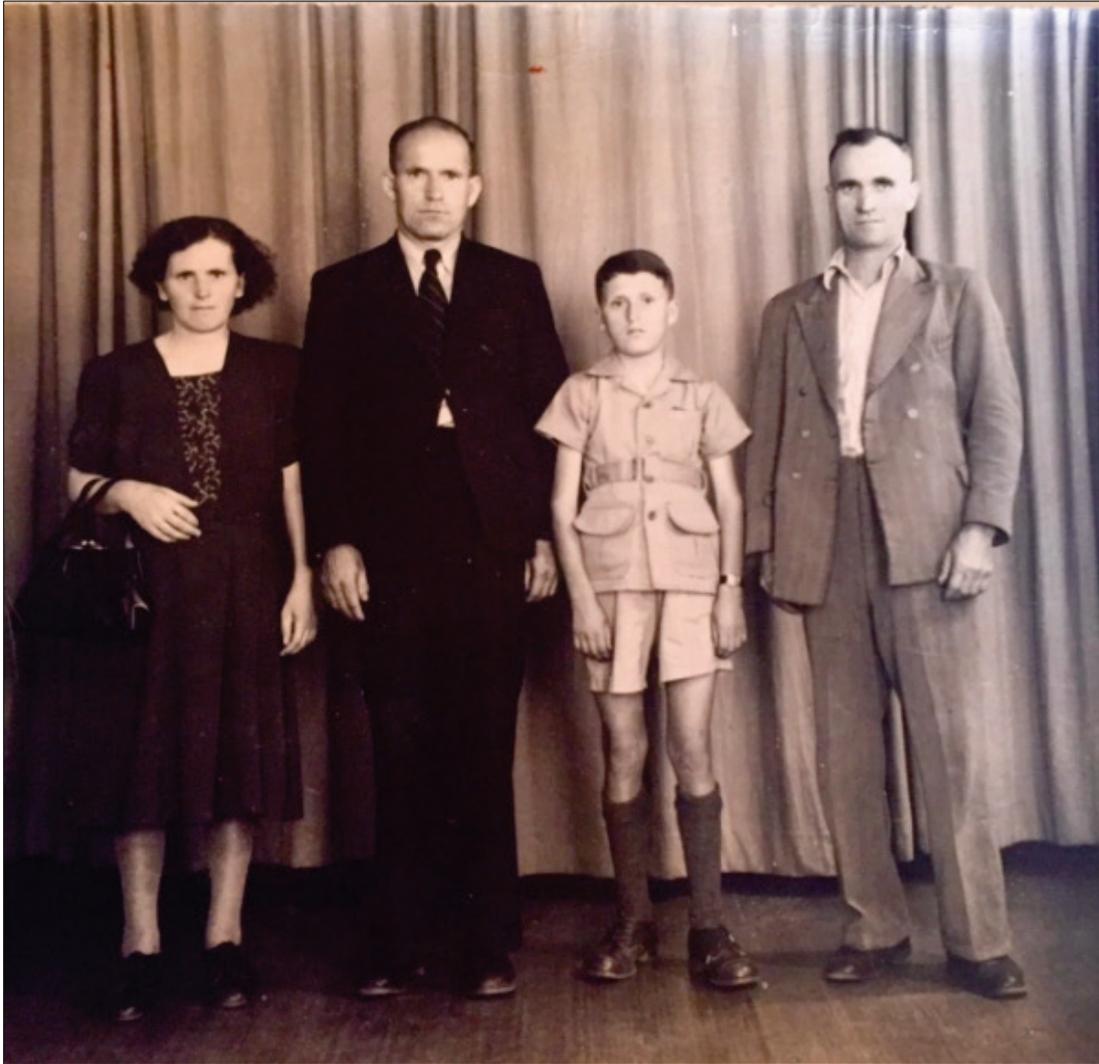
A passport photograph of George and his mother Sofka.

From Cyprus we had to go to Port Said to hop on the ocean liner that brought us over to Australia. It was a Yugoslavian ship called “Partizanka” and I remember we had Christmas on the ship. We berthed at Fremantle on the 5th of January 1949.

Onboard the ship were some people from my village — the Karafilis’ (Paul and Jim), their father was in the same situation as mine, he had been out here earlier; Stan and George Stoiche, and quite a lot of people. It was during this trip that I became very close with my lifelong friend George Eftos. Dad had a half interest in a café in Collie with his cousin, and George Eftos’ father had an interest with his brother. They had a daughter called Leta and she came with us. So there was Mrs Eftos, my mother, Leta and George and I. The three of us kids finished up living in Collie.

In Fremantle, we pulled up, the ship tied up, and there was the usual customs clearance. I then first met my father. Twelve and a half years had gone by, so I’d missed out on that father figure for that part of my life. Dad only lived until age 52 — he passed away in 1959, so I only knew him for about ten years after we arrived in Australia.

After we disembarked at Fremantle, and met my father, we proceeded to Perth to stay with Aunty Slatka Milentis, second cousin of my mother. She had a boarding house on Francis Street, and we stayed there two or three nights. I met up with my third cousins Johnny, Tassy and Louis Milentis. Unfortunately Louis has passed away but I still see Tassy and Johnny on occasions.



From left: George's parents Sofka and Kuzo Germanchev with George and an unknown person who is possibly a cousin.

After about two or three days in Perth, we arrived in Collie. That was a real culture shock.

Collie to me is like my birthplace in Australia. George Eftos, Leta and I all started school in Collie on the same day in the New Year. I couldn't speak a word of English, so this was my second attempt at learning a new language. George filled a void in my life and became the brother I never had. We grew very, very close. He had an older brother, Vic, who had come over to Australia earlier and was with his Dad. We did a lot of things together — went to school together, fought the other kids together, as they would gang up on us. In those days, being a foreign kid in a Collie school was fairly hard, so before I could learn English I had to learn how to fight. But we survived, and occasionally I go back to Collie and catch up with some of the friends I made at the Collie school.

We didn't stay in Collie all that long. Dad and his cousin split up and left the cafe and we relocated to Donnelly River Mill, which was close to Manjimup. Dad got a job there with the state saw mill and I had to catch the bus to the Yornup school. On the first day of school I

went in to Bridgetown to be told that I should be at Yornup. So I'd ended up going straight past Yornup and had to hang around at the school in Bridgetown for the rest of the day. The next day it was sorted out and I started school at Yornup. It was then on weekends, as I mentioned earlier, that I used to go to Yanmah to visit Uncle Norm, and that was a fair distance on a pushbike. It used to take me a couple of hours, on the gravel roads. I learned to ride a bike in Collie, and I can still recall the scraped knees and palms and bits of skin hanging off everywhere when I was first learning to ride a bike. Where we were living in Collie, the café was downstairs and upstairs were the living quarters. It was quite hilly, and George used to live on the other side of town so I used to bike over and pick George up and dink, and sometimes we'd come off. We hit the train once at the crossing — how we survived I don't know. George took the impact because I had him on the bar in front of me. We used to go swimming in the Collie River; it was a great time.

When we left Collie, George and his parents went to Perth. I still class George as my dearest friend. He did very well for himself in business in Perth, where he still lives with his wife, Vicki. They have a property in Yanmah and they come down quite regularly. I will forever value his friendship. When I meet with George, it's not the casual handshake; rather, we hug and unashamedly kiss each other. It's just fantastic to have a friend like George that I grew up together with.

After about 18 months of schooling in Collie and about two years in Yornup, I started an apprenticeship in Manjimup at Warren Motors, which recently closed. That's where I met Vic Kordic. Mum and Dad were still living at Donnelly River Mill, and I was living in a single man's hut just out of Manjimup, which used to be an old tobacco plantation. Mr and Mrs Louis Rumanos were related to the Germanche side somehow, so I used to board there. I remember I commenced on the wage of 40 shillings a week, and I was paying 45 shillings a week (equivalent to about \$2.50) board, so I made up the shortfall by doing odd jobs on weekends, chopping wood for people, and anything I could do to keep my head above water.

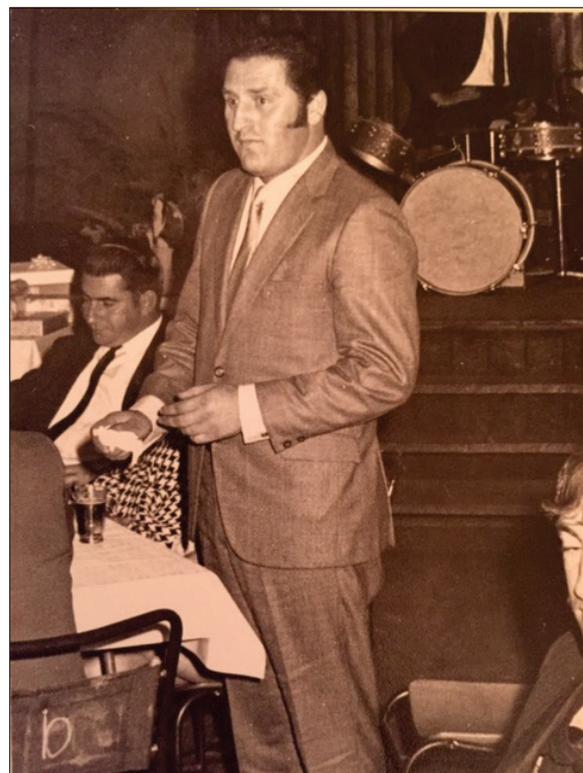
I worked at Warren Motors for some time, where there was a gentlemen named Fred Stewart, who partly owned Warren Motors with some people from Bunbury and Donnybrook. Fred eventually broke away from there and I went to work for him at a little workshop just near Rae Park. Vic Kordic, whom I'd met at Warren Motors, eventually started a business of his own and he offered me a job there. Vic had a good business head, he was a mechanic with a terrific imagination, and was one of nature's gentlemen. I owe a lot to Vic. Just to fast forward a little, when I married Bernice in 1959, Vic gave us a washing machine as a wedding present, and that, in those days was, I don't know how to describe it... A wedding present would usually be a matter of shillings and pence, but a washing machine was just a godsend for Bernice. Vic was a very astute and resourceful businessman. He founded Dingup Brickworks, he had a car agency, and his last venture, which is still well recognized, is Chestnut Grove winery, now run by his son. Vic was a very generous man. He

also started a safety-driving program at Manjimup High School. He sadly passed away about seven or eight years ago.

I will go back a little, back to my only schooling in Australia, which was very short lived, because it was an awkward time for me. I came here at twelve and a half years of age without being able to speak the language, and that put me back a bit. As I said earlier, formal education was out of the question because of my age, so I went to school for a short while at Collie and then at Yornup, but I think it was sort of primary. So at about age 16 I left school to commence my apprenticeship as a mechanic. When I was at school, I started playing a bit of sport. I played cricket, and started to kick the footy around a bit. In Yornup I was the only representative from Yornup at the Bridgetown school sports. I had to run, jump, do the lot. I was a one-man team, and at the end of that day I was totally exhausted, but it was good fun. I played a bit of footy. I started off with Imperials, then crossed over to Jardee where some of my Manjimup mates were playing and asked me to join them. That was good fun. We used to run from Manjimup to Jardee for training, then run home back to Manjimup. I played a couple of years for Jardee, but then the Warren league became the Lower South West league, so Tigers and Jardee amalgamated. So I played with Tigers for a year or so.

I was just an ordinary footballer — other people said I could play at a higher level, but a severe knee injury put a stop to that. So when I later came to Pemberton in 1961, I wasn't playing football, but the Southerners club talked me into playing. I played for a couple of years here. I then turned my hand to coaching colts, and that was a terrific period of my life, because I got to know some very good young kids that I coached, and a couple of them went on to play league football in Perth. I remain friends with a lot of those boys, who are approximately ten years younger than me.

A lot of them still live around here, but one of them, Jim Timms, one of my dearest friends, comes down from Binningup and we go to the Donnelly and he helps me at the Donnelly a lot. Others, Matthew Della Franca, John Omodei and so on, are all still my good mates.



George whilst President of Southerners Football Club, Pemberton, WA.

After I finished coaching I was on the committee for a few years, then I was vice-president, then eventually president. During that period we had a lot of success as a club. I instigated a building program and a loan from the shire, and we built the Southerners' clubrooms. Prior to that, we had nowhere to call home as a club. With the new Southerners' clubrooms all the players, or anyone that came to the district, felt as though they had a home to go to. Southerners have had terrific success over the years — we've won 18 premierships to this point, about 26 in the seconds and 18 or 19 in colts. I have seen most of these premierships, and been known to celebrate heavily at a few of them. Southerners was, and still is, a good part of my life. I was bestowed a life membership in 1970 for services to the club. I was very,



George and Bernice as a young couple.

very proud to receive that, and believe I was one of the youngest life members, as I was about 34. The club treats me with a lot of respect, and still asks Bernice and I to most functions they have, and we try to attend as many games as we possibly can.

Back to Manjimup, where I was working at Warren Motors. It was there that I met Bernice. Bernice at the time was working at Shad's Drapery and she and her friend Beverley Masters were inseparable. They were the best of mates, and if you saw one you always had to see the other. Bernice had and still has the gift to talk to all people, from all walks of life, and in those early days there were a lot of Macedonians in Manjimup and Bernice and Beverley made them feel quite welcome. I was included in that company, and a great value Bernice has is that she treats

everybody equally. Everybody with Bernice is on equal footing, no matter where you come from and what your status is in life. Actually, that attracted me to Bernice very much. Not only was she such a lovely person, she was also and still is good looking. We dated for a long time, just used to see each other at lunchtime and occasionally go to a dance or something. Sometimes Beverley would come with us. Eventually we got engaged and in 1959 we got married. It was one of our biggest days of our lives, and from there our love just grew together.

When Bernice and I got married in Manjimup, we had a very simple ceremony in the Church of England; then had a small gathering at the Manjimup Hotel with close friends and family. From there, we went to the Buegge farm, where it was an open invitation wedding. We didn't actually send out invitations to a lot of people, but lots of people came to help us celebrate our wedding that night. It was a barbecue type affair, and at the end of the night Bernice and I went on our honeymoon. We took off to Rocky Gully for our first night. We arrived there after midnight, where there were a few people waiting for us — we had a bit of an unplanned reception there. Unbeknown to us someone had leaked the word that we were going to be staying there, and some of the Rocky Gully locals thought it would be a good idea to keep the bar open and greet us when we arrived. It was actually quite funny, we wanted to go to bed and they wanted us to stay up, but it all worked out well. We continued on our honeymoon through the Great Southern region, then up to Northam, then eventually to Perth for about a week. We then came home and commenced our life as a married couple.



George and Bernice's wedding day.

We lived in Manjimup as a married couple from 1959 to 1961. When Vicki was born, in April 1960, it was a great day of joy for both of us. I was working at that stage in Bunnings' workshop just to get a bit of heavy machinery experience, and I went to see Bernice at the hospital at lunchtime. Of course I was in overalls and they wouldn't let me go into the room.

Anyway Vicki was a lovely little bundle of joy. She was full of life from the word go. It was great having a child at such an early age — I was only 23 and Bernice was 20. I'm stuck for words here, but it was just the best part of our lives. Vicki was born at the Warren District Hospital, and Robert was born later at the Pemberton Hospital. When Robert was born in January 1962, in Pemberton Hospital, for me to have a son was just fantastic. At that stage, we were enjoying Vicki's company and she gave us a good run-around. Pemberton Hospital had a really good doctor in old Doc Ryan and Matron McGillivray. So we were now a complete family, a young couple with a girl and a boy, and our life in Pemberton began.

In 1961, I was back working with Vic. He told me of an opportunity that was coming along, and he introduced me to Bill Everett, who owned a service station in Pemberton. He'd been leasing it to a chap who went broke and so it was closed down. Vic thought I could reopen it and make a go of it. So we talked it over with Bill and we became partners. He owned the building, I was doing the work, and we shared the income. It was hard going, and I was travelling from Manjimup to Pemberton, working late because I was keeping the workshop and the pumps going during the day, and if there was any field work such as milking machines and tractors, I used to do that after I closed up the shop. So I was coming down to Pemberton at 7am, which meant up at 6am, and quite often getting home after 10 or 11 o'clock. We kept this up for a few months, and we then decided we would come and live in Pemberton. Bill had a house that he offered to us. He was another very generous chap. We worked hard, cleaned the house up, and made Pemberton our home. The intentions were that we would give it about five years, and if it didn't work out I would be able to go back with Vic — that was an open offer. Bill was a lawyer by the way, but he was running an SP bookie shop in Manjimup. He was a terrific bloke to work with. We would do the books together, and his wife and Bernice got on very well so we would make an evening of doing the books on a monthly basis. After a while, I bought Bill's share out, and I became the sole operator of the Central Service Station.

It was still limited as to how much income we could make, so after talking it over with Bernice we decided to add a café to the service station, and it sort of became a small roadhouse. At that stage, the public were starting to move around, so tourism was growing and the fuel sales increased, so from there on we worked very hard and had a reasonable income. In time, I bought the freehold from Bill, so then it became our own service station, and we could do whatever we liked. We worked there for 25 years, from 1961 to 1986.

It was hard work but we got to know a lot of people. A lot of our customers still remain friends, not just Pemberton people and locals, but people that were coming down on a regular basis from the city or other areas.



George's first business, Central Service Station, at Pemberton, WA in the early 1960s.

When we sold the service station we became a bit out of touch with the public, so nowadays we don't know as many people in Pemberton as we used to. Back then if a stranger came to town, everyone knew everyone, and I made it my business to get to know them, and quite often that would create business for us.

I'll go back in time once more. My father and mother moved from the Donnelly Mill to Manjimup. As I said before, I'd been living in Manjimup in a small single man's hut. Dad bought half an acre with a little home on Ray Street, and we lived there for about ten years together before Dad passed away in August 1959. So I was only with my father for ten years, which is a void in my life I've always regretted. The other was not having any siblings. But that changed when I met Bernice, because immediately I had three brothers-in-law and two sisters-in-law. With the Buegges being so family orientated, it was just terrific to be a part of that group. They had relatives everywhere who treated me as one of their own, and still do. It's just fantastic to be a member of such a large family.

As I said, my father became a British subject (that is the same status as Australian Citizens nowadays), and so because Dad was an Australian Citizen when I was born I was half Australian anyway. In 1954 both Mum and I officially become Australian Citizens. Mine was just an endorsement by a person in Manjimup, Ike Doust, who was a JP, so that's how I became a true blue.

Vicki and Robert went to school in Pemberton. Kids in those days used to play sport 24/7. Robert always had the cricket bat in his hands. We built our present home and moved in in 1969, and Robert made the driveway his pitch. Kids from the neighborhood would come, put up an empty drum as the wickets, and they would play cricket. Anything over the fence was out. So Robert became quite a good cricketer, he played cricket for the Manjimup High School and was an opening batsman. Robert and Vicki both excelled in sport — Vicki was a very good hockey player, excellent runner at school sports, Robert was a good cricketer and a very good footballer. He won fairest and best for the club in all grades that he played in, and he also won the Lower South West Football League colts fairest and best. In my opinion and that of a lot of people who were involved in the club, Robert, given the opportunity, could have gone onto bigger and better things with his football. No doubt if he had the opportunities and coaching programs that kids have access to now, he could have played at the highest level. When Robert went to Perth he had an offer to go to East Perth, but he chose to study rather than play football and I think that was a wise choice.



George and Bernice's two children, Robert and Vicki Germantse.

My life in Pemberton has been very rewarding. I got to meet a lot of new people and make lots of friends. Pemberton identities like George South and Peter Sparrow became life-long

friends. I took up fishing in a very serious way. Fishing is my passion. We had an angling club and we used to go away once a month over the weekends. Robert used to come, as did a lot of boys in his age group. It was just fantastic. I still love fishing, and although I'm restricted somewhat now, I still love to go down the Donnelly and wet a line. Peter Sparrow actually introduced me to the Donnelly, he had a hut there called "Runamuk", a well known hut, and he offered it to me on a couple of occasions.

I was so taken by the place that I bought a little boat and decided I would like to build a hut down the Donnelly. A lot of friends helped me with that, particularly Roy Okwell who suggested I build next to him, and he would help me with the hut. He was a great friend and help to me over the years. Anyway I built the hut, which was hard work, building a hut out of nothing. Everything had to be taken down by boat, and it had to be done after hours, in between work. I would go down early afternoon, work early into the night, then come back early in the morning to start work. But it's been well worthwhile, because the kids and some of their friends have had terrific times down there, and I think most of our grandchildren have been there and I'm sure they have all enjoyed it.



George the keen fisherman.

I would just like to add a little bit about my dear mother, who some of the older grandchildren would remember as Baba Sofka. She was a wonderful mother to me, brought me up when my father wasn't around, at a time that was very, very difficult. We had very little to eat so Mum provided all the food from the garden. Our staple diet was mainly beans and vegetables; there was very little meat to go on the table. She made everything from bread to beautiful Koras, a delicious Macedonian pie. Very simple, staple foods that as a youngster you tend to tire of, but now, as I get old, I seem to miss that flavour. I have been

very lucky that Bernice has taken up some of the Macedonian cooking, and we both enjoy that very much, and I think Vicki and Robert are partial to it as well.

Mum was a very hard-working woman. In the early days in Neret she worked day in day out trying to keep the household going. We had neighbours and the Mechkarov's who weren't very far away. But her family village was about a day's walk so we seldom went there. When we came to Australia, Mum again tended to her garden. She wasn't very well by this time and spent a lot of time in and out of hospitals. It was a difficult time for all of us. On a couple of occasions Mum had to go to Perth.

We had no means of transport, so it fell on me to make some arrangements and take Mum to Royal Perth Hospital. On one occasion I remember we got a lift with one of the Manjimup bakers, but there was only room for the driver and Mum in the front of the ute. I had to sit in the tray all the way to Perth, and it was night time in June, so freezing cold.



Sofka Germanchev with her much loved dog at Manjimup, WA.

When Dad passed away in 1959 and Bernice and I moved to Pemberton in 1961, Mum was left home in Manjimup on her own. One of the young Marginis relatives moved in with her

to keep her company, but it wasn't long after that that she broke her leg and it wouldn't heal. It was then that they found that this inherited Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease was prevalent in the family. The broken leg wouldn't heal for about six months, so she was sent to see a physician in Bunbury, Val Lischman, a wonderful and recognized doctor in the South West. He stumbled onto why the leg wouldn't heal; it was due to the nerve damage because of the Charcot-Marie. Eventually the leg was put in plaster and it healed superficially but she couldn't work very well. Mum went to Moonya Lodge, and we rented out her little house. That was a drag as people weren't always the best of tenants. There were things going wrong, so I was in and out of there trying to fix things up, whilst trying to run a business in Pemberton. We would try to go in and see Mum at least once a week. After a while she had to go to the William Wing of the Manjimup hospital, which is for the next stage in aging.



George and his much-loved mum Sofka in her later years.

Mum passed away in 1994. Bernice and I had been reluctant to go anywhere because of her sickness, and we knew this would eventually happen, but she hung on very well. Unfortunately when Mum did pass, we weren't here to see her go. Vicki took responsibility and rang us — we were camping at Warra station south of Exmouth, where we used to go

for a number of years. I was out fishing in a boat with a friend when the message came through that she didn't have long, so we hurriedly packed up and drove virtually all night and all the next day only to be greeted in Geraldton by Gillian Court, one of Vicki's friends who used to be our neighbour. Vicki had called Gillian in the hope that we would stop there, and as we pulled up outside her house she was actually waiting for us. Vicki had been on the phone, but must have just hung up. Gillian passed the news onto us.

Vicki was terrific, and had been a regular visitor to the hospital, especially when we were away. After Mum's passing we held a wake at Vicki's and she did a fantastic job. We had a good gathering of family and friends there to finally send Mum off.

Poor old Mum did it hard all of her life, but she did live long enough to see what she always was hoping for — some of my grandchildren, her great-grandchildren. Not all of you were able to meet her, but some of you did, and I hope that you will remember her.



Seated: Bernice & George, Standing: Robert & Vicki, at George's 80th Birthday, July 2016.

So here I am — fifty years after saying I'll only come to Pemberton for about five years, still in Pemberton. We've made Pemberton our home and are very lucky to stay here for the rest

of our lives, content and satisfied with life and proud of our children, Vicki and Robert, their choices of partners Paul and Kristen, and the seven beautiful grandchildren they have brought into the world.



Bernice and George with all seven grandchildren at George's 80th celebration in July 2016. Back: Hannah Germantse, Jennifer Rose, Timothy Rose, Rachel Germantse, Claudia Germantse, Eleanor Rose, Lucy Rose.

I've had a couple of hiccups along the way, but with the love and devotion and care of a good woman, I have got over that. Now I like to think I am slowly getting old, but there is an upside to that, and that is the pleasure of watching your grandchildren grow and blossom into adulthood. We are very proud of what they have all achieved in their chosen careers. I cannot find the words to describe how much I love each one of you. I hope you all realize that.

My Life in Neret and Pemberton was recorded in 2011 and transcribed and edited by Lucy Rose.

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