



Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey - Greek Oral Histories 1983/146

Oral interview of
Marie Braou

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Conducted by Diane Holt

Transcribed by Lee Ann McMeans

Center for Sacramento History
551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd
Sacramento, CA 95811-0229
(916) 264-7072

cs@cityofsacramento.org
www.centerforsacramentohistory.org

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This is Diane Holt interviewing Marie Braou for the Sacramento History Center on June 20, 1985, at my home near American River Drive, in Sacramento. Greece in the 1950s was a country ravaged by civil war, and many of the best and brightest chose to emigrate in what has been called the “Brain Drain” period of emigration. Professionals and intellectuals left in large numbers to come to America and a future that seemed to hold more promise. Marie is a typical example of that group of young adults who arrived in the United States in the early 1960s and quickly assimilated into the fields of education, medicine, and law. Marie has been a teacher in the Sacramento School system teaching elementary school for many years. She also specializes in teaching foreign languages.

Diane: Marie, when did you first come to this country?

Marie: I came the latest part of 1961.

Diane: What made you want to come to America, was this always something you thought about or a new idea?

Marie: Well, there were different factors. Of course, I have a sister that lives here in Sacramento, with her family. I had read about the Gold Rush and California and the earthquake in San Francisco [1906] and of course that America was a beautiful place to be, to study and work opportunity was available to everybody.

Diane: Did your sister encourage you to come and tell you that things were better here, to leave and come?

Marie: Yes, she did, she did. But it was very much on my own.

Diane: What made you want to come? Were, it must be difficult to leave your parents, to leave your home, to leave everything familiar, and strike out –

Marie: Uh huh, right. I just wanted to better myself, to get an education here, that I couldn't do it in Greece. The opportunity for young men and women at that time was very limited. I remember when I finished high school, only a small number of young students were admitted to the teacher's school. From that particular group you had to be a child of a civil servant or a student that came from earthquake effected places or a graduate of a topnotch private school in Athens like Arsakeio.

Diane: So you were pretty limited if you didn't fit into those groups?

Marie: Right, the opportunity was very, very limited.

Diane: Then if you did not come from one of these groups, what was your options? What else could you do?

Marie: Well, probably become a housewife, or maybe a seamstress, or this kind of thing.

Diane: Were there more opportunities for men, for boys, at that time? Were boys favored over girls? Were girls restricted in number, to being admitted into these programs?

Marie: Yes, because more fields were available for boys at that time.

Diane: So for a girl who wanted to advance, it was pretty clear.

Marie: Right, exactly, and not only that, but even the family thought that, well you are going to get married and then you are going to have children, you are going to take care of your husband, your children and you had enough. That was enough.

Diane: That's right. Keep your priorities straight. Don't get too much education. [she laughs]

Marie: Right.

Diane: So you packed up –

Marie: Packed up,

Diane: How did you the emigrate come to this country at that time? Did you get on a plane, not the old style boat, right?

Marie: Well, yes. I came here on a plane.

Diane: It was a different time.

Marie: Right –

Diane: No Ellis Island experience?

Marie: No, no, no. A lot of things were different, right, getting on the plane, you know, the food was different, it wasn't like Greek food –

Diane: Oh, I'm sure.

Marie: But everything was very exciting.

Diane: Of course you had a knowledge of some English I supposed? English as taught in the schools.

Marie: A very small, very limited.

Diane: Uh huh.

Marie: I don't think I knew any more than 300 words.

Diane: Well, that's something to start with.

Marie: [laughs] Right.

Diane: And then after coming to this country, you were able to enter the university system?

Marie: Well, after I came to this country, of course, I had to go to school, to learn English which was a school located on 24th and N Street. It's name is Fremont School, which I very highly suggest. After two years intensive studies there, I passed the test to go on to get a college education, so in the fall of 63 I took an entrance examination at the State University, at that time Sacramento State College. I became a student at State College at that time. In the year, of course, I majored in Education as did most of the Greek girls who were here at that time. In the year 1966, June of 66, I got my degree in teaching. I have been with San Juan Unified School District ever since.

Diane: Of course, even the younger members of the Greek American community I noticed are going into law, and going into medicine.

Marie: Right, right.

Diane: Professions which were highly discouraged I think, for girls, at least in my generation.

Marie: Right, mine too.

[Counter 50]

Diane: Yes. So that is an encouraging sign. It is important to note the differences in these two waves of immigration. The first wave of immigration consisted mainly of people who were very poor, and very uneducated and came to this country with no knowledge of English, and had to make it from the entry level jobs up.

Marie: Right, they had to start from scratch, of course. When I came, I found the church, and I found –

Diane: That's right a community already willing to help and many of the California oh, dentists, lawyers, judges, are people who came out of this wave of immigration.

Marie: Exactly, exactly.

Diane: It must have been difficult, though, the country at that time for an American to understand, it must be very hard for us to understand living under the conditions of Greece in the 1950s.

Marie: Right, well, it, it was 61 when I came here, and Greece was still trying to get up on its feet after the civil war.

Diane: Sure. So opportunities were limited?

Marie: Right.

Diane: For people in the professions, with a country trying to put it's basic needs back together.

Marie: Yes, it, it was still working, everybody was working very hard to reconstruct the country and put it together.

Diane: Do you see uh, much difference in the immigrants coming over today, even from when you came over? Do you find much difference in attitude or?

Marie: Certainly, certainly. Well the majority of the young men or women that come now, to study here, they already speak the language. They speak English quite well. They are not very much different than the young men or women in America, and I think transportation and communications have done a lot.

Diane: And they are going in [hard to hear, counter 68]

Marie: Exactly, sure.

Diane: Coming over as computer specialists, and the fields of engineering –

Marie: Right, right.

Diane: They seem to be assimilating very quickly into things –

Marie: We ought to have in mind when I came here, we didn't have T.V. in Greece, and communications were not as advanced as they are today, so.

Diane: Yes.

Marie: And not only that, but transportation has become a lot easier for everybody to travel. So they do come and see how we live here, so they go back and they try to do the same.

Diane: But there seems to be a steady stream of people still coming to this country, still emigrating.

Marie: Right, right, of course.

Diane: Because of the greater opportunities.

Marie: Opportunity, this is the dreamed land, I mean the land of dreams!

Diane: Land of dreams. Thank you Marie very much.

[Tape one, Side one ends, Counter 76]

[Interview ends]