Haig, 66, Watch Repairer & Antiques Seller

**1. Can you tell me a few things about yourself? For example, when and where you were born? Did you study for anything? Have you travelled or lived overseas?**

*My name is Haig and I’m 66 years old. I was born in Nicosia and I’m of Armenian descent. I’m divorced; my ex-wife lives in England with our two daughters, and if you are wondering if it’s better for them to be over there rather than here, I would ask what would they do here judging by the way things have become in Cyprus? My great-grandfather came to Cyprus from Kayseri in central Turkey in 1907 [he shows the shop sign engraved with “Since 1907”]. I work here repairing watches; it was my great-grandfather’s business, he started it when he came to Cyprus. When he lived in Kayseri he was a watch repairer and when he moved to Cyprus he carried on his trade here. First he opened a shop in Ermou Street [in a commercial area in old Nicosia], then after the troubles [intercommunity troubles in 1963], he moved to a shop further up, then for the last 20 years I have been here where we are now.*

[We asked why there were two signs on the shop – one for watch repair and another for antiques.]

*Why should I put all my eggs in one basket? The business with the watches isn’t going so well. People by Chinese products; if your watch breaks will you take it to be repaired or will you buy a new one?*

1. **So what sort of problems is your business going through?**

*Too many! There is no demand in the market, everyone buys cheap, then next year they buy new because they can’t be bothered...but the government wants its taxes and bills have to be paid. The Social Insurance Department took me to court. The judge said to me, “Mr Haig, you haven’t paid your social insurance.” I answered that first of all I need to pay the people I owe money to, and then I’ll pay the social insurance. Everybody wants money from me, but where’s the money going to come from? The government is nowhere to be found! Small businesses are really going through difficult times and where is the government support? Too many people have problems. This neighbourhood was full of shop owners, a little further up was Perj, they sold fabric, and further down there was a dry cleaners; they’ve all closed!*

**3. Can you tell me about the history behind your business?**

*The first shop opened in 1907 which was my great-grandfathers. Both my father and my uncle continued the tradition and became watch repairers, but each one opened his own shop. My father initially opened his shop in Ermou Street, then after the troubles between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities the town was divided and he moved further down. I have run this shop here since 1999 by myself, I moved here to this neighbourhood because the rent was cheaper.*

*When I was young my dad asked a friend of his who sold fabrics to give me a job to keep me from roaming the streets and being idle. My dad would give him money to pay me every day, and he would ask me to calculate things for him so I could learn math. What have you reminded me of now?...Then I went overseas to England and to Switzerland so I could train in becoming a watch repairer. I trained at Rolex in 1978; my father was a distributor. I learnt a lot and became specialised in repairing old watches. When I saw that watch repairs weren’t enough as a business I started to deal in antiques. Antiques are valued overseas but in Cyprus everyone has something to sell but no one wants to buy. I have an online shop as well, but if the postal service charges me the same value as the antique how am I going to sell overseas?*

1. **Since you are specialised in repairing old watches, why don’t you close the shop and go to work for someone else?**

*Who would hire me at my age?*

**4. What advantages do you see in continuing your business? Why don’t you just retire since business isn’t going well?**

*Mainly for financial reasons. I can’t live off a pension of €500 a month. And then what will I do at home? Play with my cat all day? I live alone, my daughters live abroad. Look! [He points to an old moped]. I come here on my moped, park there across the road; I stay here ‘til 4pm from Monday to Saturday and then I go home.*

[he was asked if the business has a sentimental value for him.]

*Of course it has, how can it not? But the reason I am still here is mainly financial since I can’t live off my pension. I don’t make a lot but I am able to supplement what I get from my pension.*

**5. Are you facing any obstacles or problems in keeping your business going?**

*Now I’m going to be blunt with you. I am completely fed-up; there is no support from the government at all. Since we joined the European Union prices have gone up, people have lost their jobs, businesses have closed down but they are acting as if nothing is going on! Look at what happened with the banks [referring to the banking crisis that struck Cyprus in 2013]. Salaries were brought down, they say to improve the economy but salaries haven’t gone back up. How is someone supposed to live like this? It was my daughter’s birthday and I bought her an old camera as a present to send to her because she does photography. The camera was worth €100, and the post office wanted another €70 for me to send it. So I can’t even be competitive in selling antiques overseas. Someone might see something they want to buy from my online shop but when they see the final cost with the shipping expenses they change their mind.*

**6. Considering the experience that you have built up over the years but also the experience that you are going through now, would you say that you are still able to maintain the business and deal with the problems that affect it?**

*Not many have the experience or knowledge that I have. But what can I do? Times have changed. I’m trying to keep my expenses down and I even bring water from home in a canister to make my coffee and wash my hands. These are the conditions I am working with now.*