Christos, 73, Bath & Sanitary Fittings, Xylotymbou

**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’s Christos and I’m 73 years old. I come from Ammochostos [an occupied town east of the island] but I live in Xylotymbou [a village in the district of Ammochostos towards Larnaca] where my wife comes from. I’ve got four children and seven grandchildren. All my children are married.*

**2. Have you ever owned another business in the past? How long have you been an owner of a business? How many businesses have you owned in the past?**

*There were lot of jobs in Ammochostos. I was a farmer because I used to help my father in the fields when I was younger. I don’t think you can call growing potatoes a business but that was the only business I’d had previously.*

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

*Just to clarify, I was born and brought up in Ammochostos and I also got married there, where my wife and I lived with my father for some years until our house was built. Then when war broke out [the Turkish Invasion of 1974] and we lost everything, we came to the village that my wife is from. Thankfully my in-laws were able to help us out enough, especially my mother and father, until we were able to support ourselves again. For several years I worked as a builder with my father-in-law until I worked out what I finally wanted to do. I decided that I wanted to open my own shop to make a good income. Basically I hadn’t learnt any other trade and I didn’t want to be a builder for the rest of my life. A friend of mine, who lives in a neighbouring village, approached me and he proposed that we open this shop together; I accepted. In 1994, however, I’d managed to save a large enough amount of money to buy him out of the business and become the sole owner. So, although we opened the business in 1982, the business became completely mine in 1994 and I’ve been here ever since.*

**4. What advantages did you see in continuing your business?**

*It’s a business that I started many years ago and I wouldn’t consider doing anything else. It might not be as busy or bring in an income like other businesses do but this is what I know how to do best, and so I carry on doing it. I’ve learnt everything there is to know about sanitary fittings for all types of houses; I have a lot of experience. Also, I don’t have many running expenses. This is our own property; the land belonged to my father-in-law and he gave it to us. Our house is on the first floor above the shop, and we have warehouses at the back. So I’m not paying out anything extra.*

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

*Most of the problems are related to the economic crisis and its consequences which are still affecting us, even after all this time. My business relies on the construction sector; when this particular sector isn’t flourishing and isn’t recovering then I’ve got problems. As a result I don’t have a satisfactory enough income at all. Come and see how full the warehouses are [he shows the warehouses full of stock]. Most things have been sitting here gathering dust for several years now. I’ve only sold a few things over the past years. Are there more problems to ask for? You suggest that I should close up shop and live off my pension; can you live off a pension of €300 [a month]? And what about all the stock I’ve got here and I’m €50.000 in debt; what should I do? [He asks obviously distressed by the fact.] Maybe once I manage to sell all this stock I might be able to consider it, but right now, no way.*

**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?**

*Like I told you, I’ve got the experience and I’ve got the knowledge but the past few years haven’t been encouraging. They say that business in the construction sector is beginning to improve; how can they be better when I haven’t seen an improvement? As I said before, I’ll work here until I’ve sold my stock and then I’ll consider closing down.*