Christakis, 65, Carpenter-Furniture Maker, Avgorou

**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?**

*I’ve just turned 65 and I was born in Avgorou. I went to a technical school in Larnaca and trained to become a furniture maker. I’ve been doing this job for 35 years. I’ve got three children; my two sons are married and work with me and my daughter is 15. I had my daughter at an older age and she’s my baby. I got divorced about eight years ago but we’ve got a good relationship with my wife because of our children. So I’ve concentrated more on my work since then.*

**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?**

*I worked in a different industry when I was young, as a hotel employee, because I didn’t have enough money to start up my own business. After I’d saved enough money, I started my business and 35 years later I’m still here. I really like my job and you know, it’s very different owning your own business than working for someone else.*

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

*I started this business 35 years ago after I’d managed to save enough money. It’s something that I learnt at school, that I really enjoyed, and I always wanted to open a furniture business of my own. I mostly make wardrobes for new houses, wooden tables but anything else that has to do with wood including fencing [he shows me an album of photographs of jobs he has done]. As I’ve already told you, I work with my two sons. One is 35 and the other is 29. It’s a registered business and my two sons are the owners.*

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

*As I had told you, I learnt the trade when I went to technical school and I was very good at woodwork. It’s what I’d always wanted to do. I love what I do and I’ve never thought about doing anything else. Sometimes, you have to do what you want, and your children should do the same. I’m happy that my sons decided to follow in my footsteps and carry on the business [he shows his pride since his sons were at the workshop at the time], but I’m disappointed with the way things are nowadays.*

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

*The only problem we’ve got is the competition with companies like IKEA, Leroy Merlin and Super Home Centre. These companies offer ready-made products for kitchens, wardrobes and other things and quite a few people buy from them. It’s completely different because their products aren’t good quality and people think they’re buying something better; that’s not true. What we do is to go to people’s homes and make everything for them and we give a long-term guarantee. I’ve never had complaints from my customers, and because we’re a family business we always find ways to solve any problems. This is the biggest problem we’ve got, and unfortunately the government isn’t helping us to compete with them.*

**6. Do you get a pension? Since you get a pension and the business is going through difficult times, why don’t you stop working?**

*Things are difficult but how can I stop working when I’ve got a fifteen-year-old daughter who will be going for studies? I get a pension but it’s not enough to pay rent for an apartment that I live in and for me to get by, and what will it be like when I have to support my daughter through her studies in three years’ time? So you can see that it’s very difficult for me to close down and stay at home. When my daughter finishes her studies I’ll definitely stop working and leave the business to my sons. Just think, both my sons and I get an income out of the business, but how can you share half a pie between three to satisfy us all? So my two sons both work nights in the hotels to make ends meet.*

**7. Why don’t you leave the business to your sons and find work with a steady wage elsewhere?**

*That’s easy to say. First of all, my sons don’t have enough experience to take on big jobs. They need more experience [his eldest son reacts; obviously he has a completely different opinion from his father]. Apart from that, where would I get a job; in the hotels? Don’t forget I’m 65 years old. I’m not a thirty-year-old who can do anything. Anyway, I don’t think anyone would give me a job at my age. Your father might still be working at the hotel because he has years of service and they can’t make him redundant to bring in younger employees.*

**8. 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?**

*I’ve been running this business for 35 years and we’ve been through some difficult times. Just think that we’ve been through the economic crisis from 2013 and there aren’t that many houses being built anymore. We’ve definitely been affected but we’ve managed to survive and we’re able to do something we know. The business doesn’t have any expenses; I don’t pay rent or anything else. The land was my fathers and he gave it to me. We pay enough for community taxes but we’re OK. Maybe if the government or the community helped, it would be easier.*