Andreas, 71, Cobbler, Paralimni

**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’m 71 years old. I was born in Kyrenia [an occupied town], but I’ve been living in Paralimni since 1974. I’ve got two children and three grandchildren, and I’ve been working in this job for over 40 years. I didn’t go to school because I was helping my uncle in his shop in Kyrenia [he shows a photograph of his uncle on the wall]. My father died when I was 23 and so I stayed with my uncle who helped me out quite a lot.*

**2. Have you owned any other business or shops in the past? Did you have another business in the past?**

*I had a shop in Kyrenia, but after the war in 1974 I came to Ammochostos as a refugee with my wife. A few years later I decided to open this small shop, which is about 20sqm, mainly to mend shoes and boots. I opened it in 1983 once I had managed to save up some money from other jobs I’d been in. The plot of land that the shop is built on [in front of the landowner’s house] belongs to the man that owns the house here. When I came here as a refugee and had decided that I wanted to open a shop here, I asked him if I could rent it to build a small shop, since it was only being used as a parking area for the surrounding houses. He asked me where I was from and I told him that I was a refugee. For the next two years he didn’t ask for any rent at all because he respected the fact that I had lost my house in the war. After two years, when I managed to open the shop, I started to pay rent; it remains the same after all these years. We have a very good relationship and whenever he needs his shoes mended, I never take money.*

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

*We had the shop with my uncle in Kyrenia before the war and we worked together. He helped me out a lot when my father died and taught me everything there is to know about mending shoes and boots. My uncle died in the war and my wife and I came here. We lived in Dherynia for a year and then we came to Paralimni. Shoe mending was the only thing I was good at and so I decided to open my own business and continue what I had been doing before the war [of 1974]. Since then I have been working as a cobbler in this small shop; most of my customers are from Paralimni and the surrounding villages. I do get a pension but it’s a very small amount. I’m allowed to have this small shop so I can supplement my pension and so I do. Sometimes I work long hours but I’m used to it.*

**4. What advantages did you see in continuing your business? Why are you still working and not just living off your pension?**

*It’s a small shop [business] and so I can keep all my customers happy. It’s very busy during the holiday period because everyone wants to fix their shoes before the holidays. So I need to stay in more hours at work so I can serve as many customers as I can, but also to make more money. There’s no one else nearby in the same business, so everyone comes here. I think there’s another cobbler in Sotira but people go there when I’m too busy. I always say that people prefer to get their shoes mended rather than buy new ones if they think they can last out another year. They prefer to pay me €8 to mend their shoes rather than spend €70-80 on new ones. The reason why I still work is because I can. Maybe when I can’t anymore I’ll stop. But the main reason is the money because my pension is very low. When you have grandchildren you’ll see that you’ll need to help them financially so they have everything they need. My two children work in the hotels in Protaras but it’s only seasonal work for 7 months. I help as much as I can.*

*[He was asked if he still had a passion for his business and if he still works for sentimental reasons.]*

*Of course. I come to work happily every day because it’s something that I enjoy doing very much. You might wonder how it’s possible that I still enjoy my job after all these years. It’s the only thing that I learnt to do from a young age and I enjoy it very much. I’ve never dreamed about doing anything else. I am definitely emotionally tied to my job. We came here as refugees, with only our underwear, and from nothing, we managed to survive and I set up this business. After so many years it’s understandable that I’d be emotionally tied to my business.*

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

*The only problem I have is that I work alone and sometimes I lose customers because I can’t keep up with the work. But generally it’s a job that I like and that’s why I do it.*

**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?**

*As I said before, there is no one else in Paralimni in the same business and this is one advantage. There are no cobblers around nowadays. The trade is beginning to die down since the youngsters aren’t interested in doing this job. So I believe that one day there won’t be cobblers anymore, once my generation stops working in this trade. But I certainly don’t intend to stop.*