Antonis, 73, Building Contractor, Larnaca

**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 Antonis, I’m 73 years old. I was born in Nicosia and lived there until 2004 when I moved to Larnaca with my wife. We’ve got two children and two grandchildren from my second son. My eldest son got engaged five months ago.*

* **Why did you move to Larnaca since your business is in Nicosia?**

*For my wife’s sake. She comes from Avgorou [a village south-east of the island, near Ayia Napa] and her parents live there with all her sisters. I lost my parents quite a few years ago but my father-in-law passed away in 2004 and my wife wanted to be near her mother. So we bought a house in Larnaca so I can go to work in Nicosia, and my wife is near my mother-in-law.*

**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?**

*No, I was just employed as a builder until I finally decided after a few years that it was time to do something by myself.*

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

*I was working as a farmer for 37 years and then I worked as a builder on construction sites in Nicosia. I was very good at my job and I soon became a foreman. After working as a foreman for about five years, I decided to start up my own contracting business. So I opened up an office for my company. Up until 2009 we were constantly building houses and apartment blocks. There was a lot of money in it! Then things began to go downhill.*

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

*Business began to recover slowly. Prices and property values have seen an increase and this is a big advantage. The economic crisis took a positive turn and the construction sector started to recover gradually. I always had a passion for building. I might look at a house or building and I could tell you exactly what type of concrete and bricks they had used and how much it cost to build. Even when we didn’t have work I didn’t stop trying. I was constantly searching out companies and individuals to close deals with them.*

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

*There were always problems but they weren’t so apparent then. Now the rate of development is better, but we are still far behind. I think it will take a while until we reach the level we were at before the economic crisis. I’m lucky if I manage to close two or three deals now; nothing more. Thankfully I managed to save a good amount of money before the economic crisis and my wife and I have a decent life, but it will run out at some point, and I will only have my pension left which isn’t enough. I’m hoping that more projects will open up in our sector.*

**6. So you aren’t thinking about retiring at all, even though the situation is still difficult?**

*I get a pension but to live off my pension and not work [he smiles ironically]? And what would I do? Sit at home or go to the beach like a tourist? Absolutely no way. I will work for as long as I can and spend the money with my wife. We have done enough saving for our children over so many years. Now that they’re working, it’s time for me to travel and buy things I want for my wife. How long do you think we have left? I’m 73 years old.*

**7. 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?**

*The way things are now, I will work for as long as I can; I make a little money with a few houses every year. There is still potential in the sector, as long as the government helps a little with the interest rates and loans, and allows people to take out loans to build their houses.*