Stefanos, 84, Tailor, Nicosia

**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 84 years old; I’ve got three children and six grandchildren. I was born and brought up in Nicosia and I’ve been working here from a young age. I work six days a week, seven hours a day.*

**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?**

*This is the only business I’ve ever owned. It’s something I’ve been doing since I was a young child. I opened this business in 1966, making tailor-made suits mostly for men.*

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

*My father was a tailor and he had his own business on the other side of Nicosia. He had a lot of customers, mostly Turkish-Cypriots, and I worked there with him. When I grew up I decided to open my own shop and so I found this place here and I’ve been renting it ever since. The owner of the building passed away and his children took over and so I pay them some rent money every month. They’ve tried a number of times to increase the rent or to get me to leave so they can sell it, but thankfully they’ve never managed it and so I’m still here. This shop has been through some bad times. Just think, I was here during the inter-community struggles in 1964 and the invasion of 1974.*

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

*Its position here is really good because it’s behind Ledra Street. Also because I’m from the older generation of the area, nearby schools and also universities come here on field trips and so more people learn about me and support me.*

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

*I don’t have any problems with the shop here apart from that the building is quite old. Just think that on top of the building was a canopy for soldiers during the war in 1974, rockets would fall in the street next the shop. Naturally I had left the shop at that time because I went to fight in the war too. So because of the damage the building had suffered because of the war, it’s stayed as it was and they only fixed the roof [it was quite an old building with quite a few obvious holes and damage]. If you look further along you can see bullet marks on the walls [he points to the bullet holes on the walls]. I’ve been witness to a lot of things around here all these years. People were dying in the streets during the war. Nicosia suffered brutal attacks [he was obviously moved by the memories as he spoke to us]. But don’t think that it’s any different now. There might not be a physical war but there’s an economic war. I’ve hardly got any work now; almost all the shops sell ready-made suits and other clothes which you can try on and if need be, they can alter them for you at the same place. The few customers I have left are older gentlemen who come here because they’ve known me for years. But the younger men don’t come here. For example would you go to a tailor to have a suit made for work? No, you’d go to a shop, buy a ready-made one and be done with it. I just cover my expenses, my rent and my electricity. I don’t make much from my customers. I don’t even order coffee anymore; I have my little gas burner and I make my own.*

**6. Why don’t you retire since you aren’t making any profit from your business?**

*And what am I supposed to do? Sit at home all day? I’ve been here for 52 years. It’s not that easy to just shut the shop and stay at home. It’s like you saying that you’ve lived in your house for all these years and now you’re thinking about moving. Would you do it? – I don’t think so.*

**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 shop here is my whole life. You asked me why I still work and I’ve answered. I’m emotionally tied to the business. I admit that it does help me a little in increasing my income; I get a pension of €492 a month so whatever extra I get helps. But the main reason is sentimental. I’ve spent so many years here and I wouldn’t dream of stopping. It’s a way of life. Naturally there will come a time when I’ll have to stop because I won’t be able enough. I’m already 84, so the time will definitely come when I will stop.*