**Loukas, 74, Building Merchandise Shop, Evrichou**

**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 74 years old. I was born in Dikomo which is occupied by the Turks now. I’ve got two children. My son is single and my daughter is engaged; both of them work in the business [they were both there at that point]. I married my wife when I was 19 in Dikomo and we lived there until 1974 when war broke out with Turkey. So we had to move somewhere else; first we went to Limassol as refugees in 1975 and then we came here to Evrichou where my wife comes from.*

**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?**

*My father did various jobs before he opened a building merchandise shop in Dikomo. I did the same. I used to grow potatoes and sell them in the surrounding villages, then I worked as a builder on construction sites but I wasn’t an owner of a business. Look at how worn my hands are from the work that I’ve done [he shows me his scarred hands].*

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

*When Turkey invaded Cyprus, we came here as refugees and my mother-in-law gave us a place to stay. There are flats on the first floor and my wife and I stayed with my in-laws [he showed me the flats that are above the shop]. A few years later I decided to use the ground floor space to open my own business. It was a difficult period but we really needed to do something for a steady income. I knew that if I went to work for someone else I wouldn’t earn enough to support my family and so I opened the shop. My in-laws gave us some money and we gradually built up the business. I’ve been running this business since 1979 when we sold screws and some other materials – nothing else [there was a photo on the wall from when the shop was opened]. Then we managed to put in more stock of other items on the shelves.*

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

*Since I had done various jobs in the construction sector when I was younger - I had worked as a metal worker, with piping and other jobs - I knew these technical jobs really well, so I opened a business which sold everything I knew about. It’s also the only building merchandise shop in the surrounding area [note: during the interview three customers from other villages had come into the shop to buy supplies]. There isn’t a shop like this in Galata, Kakopetria or anywhere else nearby. I knew that the residents of the nearby villages would come here to get their supplies. That’s how I managed to grow the business.*

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

*Cypriots have this habit of going to buy something and not paying for it straight away. I had quite a few problems with customers who would come to the shop to pick up supplies and they would tell me that they would drop by later to settle the account. People like farmers who are in the fields and builders don’t walk around with wallets on them, they come here asking for a bag of screws for example and they say that they came in from the job and don’t have money on them so they’ll come in to pay later. This happens because I know them and I know that they’ll come in and pay tomorrow or the day after. The biggest problem though, are the customers who had a large credit account with us, and when the economic crisis happened in 2013 they weren’t able to pay the balance on their account. So we lost a lot of money because of this [he was obviously upset and angry about it]. We’ve managed to stop this habit over the last years but there are still a couple of instances when it happens.*

**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? Why are you still working?**

*This business is like my child. I managed to open this business after many sacrifices, without any money in my pocket and I remind my children of it every day. I’ll run the business for as long as I’m alive and I will always be capable of doing it. I don’t care what my children do after I die. I have opened a shop, grown the business and expanded it over the years despite the difficulties, and so I consider it a success. You asked why I still work. The people that come here want to see Loukas, because Loukas knows exactly what they need to get the job done. I think that when I die and my children take over, it will take a while for our customers to trust my children and for them to learn the job well enough. So, first, because I love being here and second to teach my children as much as I can so that they can take over when I die.*