



Part I  
Childhood Memories



## My Family and My Home

One morning, I walked into my parents' bedroom where my mum was giving birth to my brother Ollie, the fifth child in our family. I was two years old. I remember seeing lots of blood around but it did not worry me. Some ladies ran in and out carrying things, and then a baby cried. In the weeks that followed, there was commotion and lots of delicious sweets were brought by the visitors who came to see the baby. All the attention was on him of course. I was not jealous. I enjoyed the company of children coming with their parents.

There were two more births after this one; both boys. I became one of seven children in the family. We are, oldest to youngest: Julie, Jenny, Gavin, Ergün (myself), Ollie, Hans and Arnold; two girls and five boys.

Our house, on the island of Cyprus, in the town of Lefke, was a one storey building off a dirt road in a narrow alleyway. It was a mud brick house and had a gabled roof, like most houses in the area. We had to cross a narrow front garden to enter the house. We had no backyard; our garden was in front of the house. There was a deep and narrow waterway that ran beside the house. The wall of the house formed its bank on one side. My father had cemented the wall to prevent the water eroding the foundations.

He had also built a bridge for us to walk across and get to the house.

The waterway was public property and often carried water for irrigation purposes to the orange groves nearby. It would run for a few days, then stop for the next few days, then run again. When water was channelled into it after a few days of stoppage, it carried snakes, rabbits, rats and chickens; some dead, some still alive. We were always wary of snakes but we chased the other animals caught in the water. Once, my two-year-old brother, Hans, fell into the waterway and was carried away while Mum was having a conversation with a neighbour in the garden, right next to him. Jenny, who was looking out of the window at the time, saw our brother fall and screamed, pointing at the water and asking Mum to save him. Mum was not aware that the object in the water was Hans and said to Jenny, "Stop yelling! It's only a chicken. I am not going to run after a chicken." Jenny ran out screaming and ran after him. Only then did we realise what was happening. All of us ran. Hans was saved by our cousin just before he would have disappeared under a mesh wire fence. My mum was so frantic and scared of what could have happened that she cried for the rest of the day. The waterway caused a concern for my parents but there was nothing they could do, I suppose. Water canals flowed everywhere in my town; running beside roads, crossing in front of the houses or through their backyards. We just had to be very careful. When we were old enough though, we swam or played in the water on hot summer days. We carried water in buckets and watered our garden too. In bed at night. I loved listening to the gurgling noise of running water.

After crossing the bridge that my father had built, we climbed seven steps straight up to a porch before entering the house. We had one very small bedroom and one larger one. There was a hallway and a very narrow kitchen. The toilet was down in the garden; just a hole in the ground with nothing else in it. We

had our baths in a shed. Next to the shed there was an open fire place outside with a cauldron full of water on it. Having a bath in there was alright in summer but in winter, we froze until we finished. Julie helped me bathe when I was young and carried me into the house afterwards, wrapped in a bath towel. I fell out of Julie's grip one day, flat on the ground. She picked me up and ran inside giggling.

There was no such thing as a laundry. A marble or some sort of stone trough was mounted on a high platform next to the outdoor fire place; that was our laundry. Whether in the heat of summer or in the freezing cold days of winter, washing was done in the open. On washing days, which were often and lasted the whole day, my sisters carried water in buckets from the one and only tap in the garden. They filled the huge cauldron and constantly fed the fire with wood. Mum washed and scrubbed all day.

The top of the small porch in front had a grape vine; its branches intertwined in a disorderly fashion, providing shade. About eighty per cent of the houses in Lefke had grape vines in their gardens, mainly over a pergola leading to the house, or over a porch at the rear. These vines were necessary to provide shade in the hot summer months and as a source of food. The vine leaves were picked and stuffed to make dolma. The vines also produced delicious grapes. People spent most of the daytime under the shade of the vines, drinking Turkish coffee with neighbours, and peeling vegetables to cook for dinner. Most families ate lunch and dinner under the grape vines and also entertained there. We were no exception to this custom. Mum even did her sewing with her apprentices under their shade.

Porches were like an extension of the houses all year round. People sat there for warmth in the sunny days of winter, and cooled down in the cool breeze of hot summer days. Some of the newer houses built in the 1950s onwards were made

of bricks or concrete blocks. Their roofs were mostly flat and accessible via an outdoor staircase. Some of those houses had trellised grape vines above the roof; a natural, attractive, useful and productive insulation. On summer nights, the flat roof tops were used as living areas, for cooling off in the northerly breeze, after the sweltering heat of the day. The temperature in summer was between thirty-six to forty degrees every day, for four to five months, from May to October, so the vines provided much needed comfort and shade.

My two aunties, my father's sisters, lived in houses on either side of us. They both had kids of our age and we played together. My two aunts on my mother's side lived just around the corner from us. We were related to almost the whole neighbourhood.

My brothers and I always kept busy somehow. We shared part of the garden to plant vegetables for our consumption.

During the summer months, we were always playing outdoors with the neighbours' kids. Our playground was mainly the streets. We made up our own games; sometimes it was hop scotch, soccer, or poison ball, where the rules were often altered to suit the loudest boy among us. We only went home for lunch and, especially for dinner so we could get ready for bed early. We always had to wash our feet before getting into bed. We had a bath about twice a week; we boiled the water ourselves on the open fireplace. You can imagine how difficult it was, for seven children. I think that life then was hard but interesting.

My father was a short and stout man with a dark complexion. Most of us inherited his skin colour. He worked two jobs to put food on the table, and that's probably why we hardly saw him. He worked at the copper mines and had his mechanics shop.

Dad was very strict; an authoritarian. He disciplined his kids in the only way he knew and the way he probably learned from his forebears. I always wanted a hug from him and to be able to

talk with him but I never received that hug or had the courage to talk with him. I was scared of him. Unfortunately, none of us communicated with him much because we were so afraid of him. If we needed something, such as pencils and books or shoes, we would tell Mum or Ollie to ask him, rather than ask ourselves. My father would yell first, and then question us if we asked him. I think now, that maybe he could not afford to buy what we wanted. We were never short of food though; he never failed to provide it.

My father never allowed my mother and sisters to go out. They were always home. We were not allowed to go to the cinema. He could not bear other men looking at our mum and sisters. He sent my sisters only to primary school. He did not think that girls needed any further education.

My mother was also a short person but slim. She had an olive skin and brown hair. She was a kind hearted and quiet lady. She never yelled at us, unless we really did something dramatic. Mum was a dressmaker and worked from home, so she was always around when we needed her. She provided some necessities that my father could not. We were not poor or rich; we were an average family, as far as I remember.

We grew up under the loving, caring and watchful eyes of our mother who protected us from harm. My mother's kindness and father's restricted ways and harsh disciplinary measures moulded and shaped our personalities.

My mother was a well known dressmaker in the town. She had a few apprentices and lots of people came and went all the time to bring their materials or for fittings, or to choose a design for their dresses from the fashion magazines Mum kept in the house. Mum had a long working table in the hallway and was making dresses all the time. That table was very heavy; I know, because

Mum used to tie us to the table's legs whenever we misbehaved!

Back then, my favourite food was black eyed beans. All Mum's apprentices knew that, and if they brought some for lunch for themselves, there was always some extra for me. I sat and ate with them.

Every year, for the New Year, my father bought a fresh pine tree. We decorated it and hung real mandarins, bananas and cherries on it instead of tinsel. Our New Year's dinner was usually a roasted turkey. After dinner, we ran for the tree. My father always played music on the record player but I don't remember anyone dancing; even though I loved dancing, I did not dare to dance in front of my father.

New Year's Eve was the only night I remember my father sitting at home with us. Every other night, he was with his mates at the cafe until his bed time. A man's place was with his mates; not with children or wives. Almost every man thought the same then. Staying at home was not considered manly. Like most other men at that time, my dad was very strict and did not show his affection to us. I don't think it's the right way to discipline your child but that's the way it was for most men in those days. They didn't know what they were missing.

Men provided food, shelter and clothing for the family. Looking after the kids and attending to their physical and emotional needs was a woman's job. Fathers disciplined their children very harshly. Mothers were more lenient in this respect. They were more like protective angels; my mother was anyway. My friends had similar family arrangements too.

We had a radio in our house and on some winter afternoons we sat and listened to the music or the news. During the cold winter nights, a lady and her daughter who did not have a radio visited us often to listen to the news and music. The daughter told us long, scary stories and fairy tales. She made it sound so real. She

was born blind. We used to sit around the fire place toasting bread, roasting olives, halloumi cheese and chestnuts, - they were my favourite - and listening to those stories. Sometimes, it was my mum who told the stories. I always asked for scary ones and I was too frightened to move later. I am glad that we never had television.

We hardly went out as a family. We were never bored though. We always had neighbours' children and our cousins to play with. We helped with some of the house chores too, like maintaining the garden and taking care of our animals. Mum was busy sewing and my father worked. They appreciated our help, which all of us provided without complaining. The tasks we performed were like our entertainment as well as our life education.

Twice a year, we went to my grandmother's house as a family, on our holy days called Bayram. Those days were very special to us. The night before Bayram we would polish our shoes or get our new shoes and clothes ready. The next morning, we would wake up early and get dressed, have a quick breakfast and visit every household in our area. We would kiss our neighbours' hands and they would give us either lollies or money. I preferred money. We used to go home and count the money to see who collected the most, stuffing the lollies into our mouths at the same time.

After paying our respects to our parents and neighbours, all of us would go to our grandma's house on the farm. She lived at the opposite end of Lefke from us, on the fringes, just before entering the town. In fact, my grandparents' house was the very first house you came across before entering the town from the north. We did not have a car and I do not remember how we got there; we probably walked more than an hour from our place. They had cattle, sheep and chickens and we always had such a great time there that we did not want to return home



at night. On the farm there were olive trees, orange trees and many other kinds of fruit trees. There was plenty of space to run around and play. All my cousins on my father's side came there on those occasions. At least forty people gathered together for Bayram celebrations. We collected lots of money from our relatives. We did not care about anything else. During the day, we played soccer and hide-and-seek and ate our lollies.

A feast always followed the celebration. I wonder now who cooked all that food! My father's two sisters lived there with their families and I guess they all helped. Everything was so perfect; the food, the hospitality, the singing and dancing, it was great. I wished those days had never ended.

I don't know how it happened, or why, but I stayed for the first time at my uncle Hasan's place. (He was my father's oldest brother and lived in Lefke) I never wanted to stay overnight at anyone's place. I did not care how nice they were. I was very shy. I was happy being with Mum all the time. Every one of my brothers and sisters had stayed at uncle Hasan's except me. This time it was my turn to stay over; maybe because they had a farm and I liked animals. The next morning, after breakfast, my aunty said, "I am going to pick some grass for the animals. I will be down in the field. Would you like to come with me?" I said no and stayed at home by myself. The phone rang. I had never spoken on the telephone before, nor picked one up. I did not know what to do. I had seen other people picking it up and speaking into its receiver, so I picked it up and answered it. The person on the phone wanted to speak with my aunt. I ran down to the field to get her. She was about five minutes away. We ran back home together huffing and puffing.

"Where is the phone?" she said, I was confused. It was there, in front of her. I had hung up after answering! My aunty explained to me what to do the next time it rang, and went back to pick more grass. I was so embarrassed. I wanted to go home there and then.

We were able to start Kindergarten at the age of six, and attending was optional. Unfortunately, my mum, and one of the neighbours who had a daughter my age, decided to send us both to kinder. I was a little excited but the neighbour's daughter cried and kicked up a fuss. She did not want to go to kinder. On the day kinder opened, we held hands and headed towards the kindergarten. In Cyprus, children went to school by themselves, I guess because there was not much traffic and no danger from strangers. It was quite safe and I don't think our parents gave any thought at all to taking us to school themselves. When we were very close to the kinder, we came face to face with a man. I think he had Down's syndrome and was very overweight. He spoke to us in a strange manner. Of course, as kids, we were scared. The girl started crying and I followed suit. We turned around and ran back all the way home. That was the beginning and the end of our kinder year. We never went back again; but when the time came to go to school a year later, I was ready. I had no problem then.

We had lots of animals at home; rabbits and chickens for our daily meat and egg supply, and two goats for fresh milk. We were lucky enough to have three free lambs each year from Uncle Hasan's sheep and cattle farm. Every year, he gave one lamb to each of us; Gavin, myself and Ollie. Ollie always got the unhealthiest lamb, but somehow when the time came to slaughter them, his was the meaty one. We never enjoyed seeing the lambs being slaughtered but we knew we would get another three next season, and understood that they were for eating.

I was outside one day, making a little toy car out of beef cans with wheels out of bottle tops. I finished and tied on a string to pull it. Suddenly, I heard aeroplanes continuously thundering up and down in the sky above. I knew that war was breaking out. My mum often talked about it. We had even filled buckets with stones, so that if the enemy came we could bombard them

with those stones. On this day, I felt really scared, left my toy car outside and ran into the house.

Soon, it was time to feed the rabbits and the goats but we did not store food for them at home. We had to take the goats to the fields to feed them every day or go and pick some grass from the fields for them. One day around those times, Julie and I took a goat each and headed to the fields about twenty minutes away. As the goats were feeding, we heard warning sirens and people shouting, "The Greeks are coming!" Of course, we were both very young and scared. Julie said to me, "Let's run back home!" How can you run while dragging goats along? It felt like ages before we reached home, our hearts pounding violently. We expected to find Greeks everywhere, but there were none. Planes still flew loudly overhead. My family was safe and that was what really mattered to me. I was five years old.

The days leading up to the 1963 war in Cyprus were frightening. During that period, some people were killed, and some disappeared, never to be seen again. Those must have been the darkest days. Food became scarce; there were bread and water shortages in town. The bread was inedible. I remember walking and shouting in the streets with a lot of people protesting about the horrible bread we had to eat. Water for drinking and cooking was the main concern though. A truck came to our street with a water tank everyday, and we ran with buckets to collect some water for home, but it was never enough. We often went with Mum carrying our buckets to the primary school twenty minutes up the hill. We were allowed to get water from there. It was hard work but we had no other choice.

The intensity of war eased up a little after a few months and we were able to find food and water during the following years.

I was growing up; I remember playing with our neighbour's children and my cousins in the streets in front of our houses.

Marble games were my favourite, even though I usually lost all my marbles to someone else. My mother's two sisters, Vahibe and Fatma, lived very close to us and next door to each other. Vahibe, the oldest, had nine children. Aunty Fatma was second oldest and had eight children. The games we played with our cousins and other children in the area were never ending. On summer nights, Mum and Dad used to let us go to a neighbour's house to watch television. Those nights were very enjoyable. We kids used to sit outside the house or in their garden and watch TV together. We gave no trouble. We usually watched *Bonanza* and then headed back home.



*My family: Back row: Julie, Hüseyin (my father), Macide (my mother) and Gavin Front row: Jenny, Arnold, Hans, Ergün and Olie*



*My father's workshop. From Left: My father, a customer and my youngest uncle, Osman*



*Ergün's family on his father's side. Ergün is in the front row fourth from the left*



## Some History of Lefke and its Surroundings

**T**he gardens of Piri Osman Pasha Mosque and the old cemetery were also part of our playground. The mosque was built by the Byzantines as a church during their reign in Cyprus between 395-1184. It was converted to a mosque by raiding Arabs in the tenth century. When the Ottomans took over the island in 1571 one of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent's viziers, Mehmet Pasha, saw the almost ruined mosque and rebuilt it, renaming it after his grandfather. This mosque was right behind my Aunt Fatma's house and around the corner from our own house. Often, we jumped over the fence of Aunt Fatma's yard into the olive grove, and ran across into the mosque's gardens. Part of the garden was the old and now unused cemetery. We played hide and seek among the tomb stones. Those who were daring even hid in the graves that had caved in from neglect. Two well-looked-after tombs lay side by side very near the mosque. One of them had an ornamental and turbaned headstone with an inscription in Arabic writing. It belonged to Vizier Osman Pasha. Vizier Osman Pasha, who lived for a short time in Lefke in 1839, died mysteriously and was buried in the grounds of the mosque. It was believed that he was a saint. We watched women, both young and old, and girls

coming to the gardens to visit these two graves. They used to circle around murmuring something and then lighting candles. When I enquired about these women, my mum told me that if a woman's wish came true, she would come and light a candle at the Pasha's tomb. Some of the women tied pieces of cloth on the mosque's fences in the belief that whatever their ailments or troubles were, they would stay there at the mosque.

The other grave next to Vizier Osman Pasha's tomb had a simpler headstone. It belonged to Hüseyin Aga who lived in the nineteenth century. Because he had brought water to the town in his time, he deserved a special grave. Hüseyin Aga was responsible for the design and construction of the aqueducts that are still in use today.

A branch of those aqueducts was in our area and passed through our garden. The local name for the waterway was 'Gerizler'. Some parts of this branch were built up to four metres above the ground on an arched wall around the corner from our house. The high wall was needed to carry the water from higher ground to another higher area. There was a narrow footpath on top of this wall and the water flowed in the canal next to it. We used to climb up on the wall and challenge each other to race across to the other side. It was a dangerous practice but we were daring.





## Lefke and Life in the 1960s

Lefke is situated in the North-West of Cyprus and nestled in a valley. It is surrounded by low mountains and hills. The Mediterranean Sea in the north is only four kilometres away from the town centre. Mt Olympus, the highest mountain in Cyprus, towers above Lefke in the south just beyond some low-lying mountains. In winter, its snow covered peak adds extra beauty to an already picturesque view of green Lefke. The low mountains in this area are densely covered with pine and cypress trees. Citrus trees grow well in the fertile valley that descends towards the east and north. The low hills in the immediate west are covered with low bushes and native vegetation, providing perfect farming and grazing opportunities for sheep farmers. The few houses that are scattered around this area look lonely against the white clay soil. More mountains with pine trees follow beyond the white peaks.

Most houses are built amongst the groves of citrus trees that spread over the low hills and valleys. The small town centre is densely populated. The houses are attached to each other along the two major roads that cross through the town centre. There is only one road that enters the town from the north. It divides before the city centre and becomes one again just past the town centre. Government offices, the courts and some shops are

found after this point. My neighbourhood is nearly a kilometre away from these offices. There is one other road from the East that snakes through the barren and low hilltops, down through the dry riverbed, passing some olive and orange groves into the town. However, this road is rarely used since the 1974 war.

These two major roads were the only two through which one could enter and exit the town.

Major roads in Lefke were sealed in the 1960s. The side streets running off the main roads were rather narrow and unsealed, but maintained regularly. Up until mid 1972, the streets of Lefke were unnamed. People identified the streets by a known landmark in the area or by a person's name that lived in that street. Mail was often wrongly delivered because many people had the same names and surnames and, of course, there were no street names on the envelopes. Often, people picked up their mail from the post office to avoid confusion. The streets were named in 1972 when the census was done for the first time.

Lefke is a green place all year round. It is particularly famous in Cyprus and overseas for having the juiciest citrus fruits, in particular Yafa oranges and many different species of lemons, grapefruits, bergamot, Seville and blood oranges, naval and Valencia oranges. Pomegranates, olive trees, walnuts, date palms and other soft fruit are also grown for sale or just for personal consumption. In Lefke, the smell of citrus flowers, during the spring months of April and May, is overpowering and adds charisma to the town. There is a different shade of green in each season which becomes dotted with the orange and yellow colours of ripe citrus fruit in winter and spring. The groves come to life with fruit pickers and trucks going in and out of the town during harvest time.

Lefke had good amenities and infrastructure at that time. There was a kindergarten, two primary and two secondary schools. One of the secondary schools was built by Cyprus Mines

Corporation (CMC) and was known as Technical School (Sanat Okulu). The students from nearby villages attended the secondary schools. There were three banks and some other government offices. The courts, the municipality building and police headquarters stood side by side in one complex. The hospital, high above these buildings, provided care for the whole community and nearby villages. Buildings such as these were built from yellow sandstone and stood majestically on the slopes of a hill near the town centre. Their dignified appearances showed their place of importance.

People from nearby villages came to Lefke for shopping and entertainment. There were a couple of outdoor cinemas that operated in the summer months, and an indoor one that screened the latest Turkish films and some English language ones every night. On some days, there were matinees too and they were always full. Some women were not allowed by their husbands or brothers to go to the cinemas though. There was a hotel and a couple of restaurants that opened daily for meals. 'Gazino', a public hall in the north end of town, organised parties and other events. Its restaurant, open mostly in the summer months, served delicious food on its terrace. Wedding ceremonies were also held in the hall in winter and on its terraced roof top in summer. The predictable and warm Mediterranean climate allowed these events to be held in the open.

The Ottomans had dominated the town for over three hundred years. Ottoman architectural characteristics still exist in a lot of buildings and houses. There are a number of public buildings, aqueducts and mosques dating from that time that are still in use. The town is predominantly Turkish.

Copper ore and gold were discovered by US engineer Charles Godfrey Gunther in 1912 on the fringes of the Lefke and Fugasa area. The Cyprus Mines Corporation (CMC) was formed and started its operation soon after. Lefke, with an estimated population of 3000 at the time, became an underground and

open cast copper mining town in the 1930s. Many people from around Cyprus came to work in the mines and settled there, swelling the population beyond its capacity. With the influx of workers into the area, accommodation shortage problems emerged. The CMC had bought land on the fringes of Lefke to overcome this problem, forming a new suburb named Karadağ, very close to the mines. They built hundreds of box-like identical houses in rows, for the workers. The houses were very small and had no gardens. They consisted of two rooms and a minute kitchen. A family of four to six lived in them; sometimes there were more. As a result, the area became very crowded. There was no bathroom or laundry inside. Four to six families had to share one outside toilet built in a laneway between every two rows of houses. By 1960, Lefke's estimated population had swollen to over ten thousand people.

Every two weeks, the workers received their pay-cheques, and a market was held on Saturdays in the Karadağ area, alongside the main road. Merchants from all over Cyprus and local traders opened up their stalls of furnishing and dressmaking materials, local produce, handcrafts, haberdashery and homemade sweets. People put on their best attire, women made up their faces and came to shop or came just for fun. Young men in their finery strolled up and down the market to look at the girls and maybe choose a young girl as their bride.

The residents of Lefke were fanatical soccer fans. They had their own soccer team. Brawls often broke out between different teams' supporters, creating a lot of friction between Lefke and the other communities. When a match was played in Lefke, almost everybody went to watch the game. In those days, Lefke was transformed by a festival atmosphere: cars beeped their horns non-stop, flags were raised, people argued and opinions were expressed regardless of the end result of the game. The commotion usually continued for a few days afterwards. Otherwise, Lefke was a peaceful town; its citizens

lived in harmony. The prison cells at the police headquarters were empty most of the time. The only inmates would be the occasional drunk who needed to sober up overnight, or a person who had committed a petty crime such as stealing fruit from someone else's farm.

Not many people owned a car in those days, the streets were mostly free of traffic. People walked everywhere. From the crack of dawn until late at night, there was always someone walking somewhere. People greeted each other whenever their paths crossed, or they would stop in the middle of the road to talk at length when they met in the streets. If you did not stop to chat, people would think that you were a snob. This was tough if you were in a hurry to get to somewhere.

The cafés were always full of idle men during the day. Working men joined them after work and after dinner. Men spent most of their time with their mates instead of with their children and wives. Women never went to cafés; it was not acceptable in our culture. Men drank cups of Turkish coffee, or tea, and gossiped over a game of checkers. They argued and tried to solve the political problems of the world and those of Cyprus. Gambling took place on a small scale at night time in the cafés, often in a room behind the common area ignored by police. Policemen were locals or resided in Lefke due to their work, and thus were friendly with everybody.

During the hot summer months, men sometimes spread themselves on the roads in front of the cafés obstructing the way for passing cars. They had to get up to give way to the occasional travellers in their cars. When women, especially young girls, walked through the area, all the men's eyes followed them as far as they could see. Of course, women did not like being stared at, but there was nothing they could do to change the men's attitude. That was also part of our social behaviour. It was very easy for a woman to trip over in front of the staring men, from nervousness.