

# Island vignettes; migration stories of women from the island of Crete to Aotearoa

**Dr Valia Papoutsaki has made a study of life on islands from Europe to Waiheke. She shares with us the connections made between islands through history, war and migration.**

New Zealand's last surviving veteran of the Second World War's Battle of Crete died last year aged 104. Brant Robinson was one of the lucky ones to have survived that battle on the fateful day of 20 May 1941, when hundreds of Kiwis were killed, and many taken prisoners of war. Those who failed to be evacuated sought refuge with the assistance of locals, eventually finding a way to escape from the south coast of the island to North Africa. The devastating effects of this catastrophic event were many and led a group of young women from the island of Crete to migrate to Aotearoa a few years later.

Both my grandfathers were formally recognised for their bravery and assistance to the Allies in the aftermath of that battle that led to the fall of the island to the Nazi forces and their subsequent brutal occupation. The locals risked their lives and the safety of their families by assisting the soldiers in hiding, sharing what little food they had, and helping them escape. I have vivid memories of my maternal grandmother, Eleutheria, recalling how many times she complained to her husband for taking the little cheese, goat milk and bread she had



A group of young women from Crete working and living at Middlemore Hospital after migrating to New Zealand.



A fireplace in the New Zealand home of one of the new migrants is decorated with photos of friends and family and memories of home.

set aside for her many children to feed the foreign soldiers, "Anglous", in the mountain caves. Even to this day, over 80 years later, traveling through Crete and mentioning that you are from New

Zealand will elicit a warm welcome, as a tribute to those who sacrificed their lives in the fight for their island.

Upon my arrival in Auckland, I was extended an invitation to join the Greek

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