

COMING TO CANADA CHRIS THEOFILOPOULOS

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By now, they were running the restaurant they now own, purchased in 1983.

Chris is quick to acknowledge the part Bessy has played in the family success.

"She pitched in and worked as hard as I did to make the restaurant successful."

Chris laments that people expect to get rich quick. He and Bessy have put in years of work, on the job 16-18 hours a day.

He thanks the people of the area, too, for their support over the years as he tries to "put out quality food that satisfies people."

For most of their nearly 30 years in Colborne, Chris and Bessy have had kids at home, too.

Their eldest, Bill, is 25 and studying at Humber College. Angie and Pam are at the University of Toronto. Angie has plans to enter teachers' college and Pam is studying kinesiology. Stathi is taking a similar program as Pam at Laurier University.

All four speak Greek. Chris and Bessy made sure of it when the kids were growing up. The couple

ran Greek language classes at Cobourg East before it became too much and then they drove the children to Oshawa.

Chris swells with pride and his eyes sparkle when he speaks of his children.

They are accomplishing so much. It makes the long hours spent in the restaurant worth the effort, he says. He thinks back to his early days in Canada, learning how to speak English in the city while he worked — a young man whose education was picked up as he went. Now, his children have so much ahead of them.

As they grew up, the kids pitched in at the restaurant.

"We always advised them to become good citizens. We managed to put them on the right track," Chris says. They have their culture and they have the opportunity which came from growing up and being educated in Canada.

It's a long way from that little village in Greece, but not so far that Chris Theofilopoulos forgets. He has built a Canadian success story on those roots and on his dreams.

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With a ticket in hand, the new immigrant awaited the train. His Good Samaritan bought the lad an ice cream, refusing payment once more while they waited for the departure.

An unsettling discovery

Chris had spent six months at Uncle Jerry's and was working at a full-time job in Belleville when his immigration faux pas was discovered.

Thinking Chris needed to have his visa updated, his uncle took him to the immigration office. There was no visa stamp.

The officer on duty wondered how he had gotten in, suggesting he had somehow climbed a fence. He was two-and-a-half months past the expiry date.

Chris remembers his uncle was stunned.

Chris was given six days to leave and his passport was retained.

Uncle Jerry's response? Pack your bags and head to the city.

Chris admits he was fortunate. He had a valid work permit and the immigration department wasn't as efficient as it is now. He could legally work, but he wasn't allowed in the country.

Meanwhile, back in Belleville, Uncle Jerry ran into the immigration officer who wondered how Chris was doing. The uncle replied that Chris needed his passport to cross the border to visit a brother.

He was told to "stop by and pick it up".

In the city, the teenager worked at various jobs as he tried to support himself. Work in the bakery lasted six or seven months, but he was earning only \$75 a week.

He tried his hand at the King Edward Hotel as a busboy, but left after arguing with a lazy employee who was trying to ride on the back of Chris's work.

The Prince Hotel and Hi's Steakhouse were the next stops on his journey. But, busboys weren't treated well by the rest of the staff so he was on the move once more — back to the King Edward where he was promised he could rise to become a waiter.

A trip to Belleville reminded him he liked the city life. He was soon making great money doing piece work at a fiberglass factory.

His fortunes change

After a few years as an illegal

that he open his own place in Colborne — after all, people from Colborne were traveling to Brighton. It would be better than the two brothers-in-law splitting the business.

On July 9, 1979 Vito's opened in Colborne as a take-out on Church Street at the corner of Percy. Business was booming. The local kids were pulling in lots of money picking tobacco. He was open from 11 a.m. till 2 a.m. making pizzas and subs.

But, it wasn't enough for the entrepreneurial young man.

There was no natural gas in the village at the time so he went to Belleville to see about a propane-fired grill, frier and charbroiler. He couldn't afford to buy, but he could rent. Business increased by 60 per cent. He was into fries and burgers.

Life was full, but it was all work and no play for the 24-year-old.

Starting a family

Chris found someone willing to rent his business with an option to buy and Chris was gone.

Life took one more final turn.

Chris needed to have his glasses fixed and knew a man who sold and repaired them. But the boss was busy when Chris arrived and motioned him to the young girl who sold frames. It was Chris's future wife, Bessy.

Despite some early glitches, the two were a match.

His interlude in the city ended quite quickly.

The man who rented his business split with his wife and was closing the doors. Chris needed to return and take it over.

Soon, Chris and his new wife were back in the area. Bessy was at home, next door to Frank in Brighton. Chris was working long hours in the takeout business. She was lonely.

They needed a home but had no cash for a down payment.

Shirley, the lady in the real estate office next door, came to the rescue, finding a willing seller who would hold the mortgage for the young couple. Bessy loved the two-bedroom house at 11 Burnham Street.

Maxing out all his credit cards, Chris put together the down payment and they were off.

In three years, they sold it and moved to their home at 21 King Street West.

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