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Student years

Xenia describes her student years as wonderful especially those in Athens in the early '80s when Greece was going through a social revolution with socialist PASOK taking over.

"Students at Metsovio (the Technical University) were very much present at that social turmoil, we wanted to change the institutions, I was very active with student unionism."

One of her most memorable experiences was spending three weeks in Pyongyang, North Korea, when the grandfather of today's controversial communist leader Kim Jong-un was in power. "I went there with the youth movement of Pasok, I am non-partisan for years now, I don't like the structure and military hierarchy of parties," she says.

"North Korea of 1988 was like landing at another planet, there was something really bizarre...it was as if people had no life of their own," she adds.

England was a completely different experience, it was the place where she met many Turks and Persians and she describes it as a real 'eye-opener'.

"It was very positive, a multi-cultural shock for me. Even though in Paphos we had Turkish Cypriots, socialising with mainland Turks those years was not at all common, or with Persians."

Hobbies and regrets

Xenia loves the sea and all sports or activities around it, so naturally she is into swimming, diving, sailing, water-skiing. And so are her daughters.

But dancing also played a big role in her life since she was taking up classical ballet classes for 14 years.

"I loved it. Leda is now a passionate classical ballet dancer, Maria is an athlete, she loves the track. I was a 100-metre runner myself."

She also plays the piano but her dream these days is to take up the drums and wonders whether she is too old for that.

"It was not the proper thing to do at the time, playing the drums. Girls from good homes were learning French, piano and ballet," she says laughingly.

She reads books and writes a Saturday column on environmental issues at daily Politis.

And she likes cooking, especially fish dishes, but what she really enjoys is a glass of good wine.

"My village is Kathikas, after all, it makes good wine," she says.

Travel and exploring Europe and beyond are also a passion she now shares with the rest of the family. If she could take another path in life, Xenia says it would probably be the same as the one she has already taken. But she could have become a literature teacher as well.

As for regrets, she has plenty but refuses to share them. "Maybe over a glass of wine, a good glass of wine."

Woman on top

Photos: Stefanos Kouratzis

XENIA LOIZIDOU IS TAKING THE LEAD IN A MALE DOMINATED SOCIETY

By Annie Charalambous

First Cypriot to become a member of the Europe Network for Women In Leadership Xenia Loizidou's ultimate ambition is to see the island embrace green growth.

And she wishes that men in decision-making positions in Cyprus were less patronising towards women.

"They are very polite but patronising, they do not give opportunities to women," says the 1965-born civil and coastal engineer from Paphos who is the only woman on the Cyprus Tourism Organisation's board.

"I'm not a feminist in the rigid term of the word, never was, but this second generation gender bias is very dangerous," she adds.

Xenia, who runs Nicosia-based ISOTECH environmental research and consultancy firm with her chemical engineer and waste-management brother Michalis, joined WIL last month.

The National Technical University of Ath-



TABLE TALK: Xenia at work with ISO-TECH's colleagues and associates

ens and London's Imperial College graduate explains that WIL is a network which looks for women with a potential for leadership.

Both of Xenia's parents - Greek-born Stella and late father Yiannis Loizidou from Kathikas - were Greek Literature teachers at gymnasiums and lyceums all over the Paphos district. "Generations of Paphians learnt Greek from my parents who were passionate about their job. They retired in 1986-1987."

Xenia is married to Patra-born Panayiotis Thanassas who teaches philosophy at Aristote-

lion University in Salonica.

"We met in 1999 when Panayiotis was teaching at the University of Cyprus at the house of a Turkish Cypriot good friend of mine married to a French lady - a truly multi-cultural affair," Xenia says while laughing.

"We have two girls, Leda and Maria. They are 11 and 10 respectively, only one year apart just like me and my brother who I dearly love.

"Leda is the artistic one and Maria the sporty one." Being a mother of two does not restrict Xenia from having a career and being a social activist because she is a firm believer that children need parents' time not presence.

"I do things with them, we do sports, we communicate, I do not take them to a park so that I can drink coffee with my friends while they play around."

"We are a TV-free home, we talk, we eat together every day. We do have access to information, of course we do, but we communicate." Xenia remembers taking both infants to construction sites with her and breastfeeding them there. And she sounds rather amazed at how no one was seemed bothered about it even though her profession is male-dominated.

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