Haritos together
Life was tough in Darwin in the 1920s. The Greek family homes were near what is today the George Brown Botanic Gardens. Helene Harmanis said the area was a mix of Greek, Chinese and Aboriginal families.

“There were the Quee Noys who had their jiggery further down, then the Macrides, and above them the Wongs and the Moos,” Helene said.

“Here, in the Dry, Mum had to go and collect water herself. She went down to the Chinese Gardens – there were two wells. And Mum carried the water back on her shoulders.

“She had a tough life. Mum. “Our home was more a shed than a house… stones, not brick; no concrete floor, and bed floor, beaten kerosene drum walls. We had a water tank to collect rainwater.

“It was harder here than in Kastellorizo because here we did everything ourselves. Back home, Dad would sail to Marseilles or Cairo and bring back china and pottery.

“As Dad had his own ship the family had people do things.

The family has always had a strong link with the sea. When the first Japanese bombs fell on Darwin on February 19, 1942, four male members of the family were in Darwin and each had harrowing experiences escaping the bombing and strafing by Japanese planes.

Louis Harmanis escaped by a small boat he had built, then trudged through swamps to Adelaide River, where he enlisted in the army.

In 1967, 12-year-old Rodney Haritos spent six days in a dinghy in huge seas off Western Australia after his father Nicholas’ vessel suddenly sank. Rodney, Nicholas and three others spent almost a week in the dinghy with little water and sharks circling. They were finally discovered when a RAAF plane returning to Darwin on the last day of the hunt for the men was forced outside the search zone by a massive storm.

George, the oldest of the four Haritos brothers, was a croc shooter and appeared in several books and many TV shows. He later had a huge croc in the backyard of his Bayview Street home in Fannie Bay.

George and his three brothers – my father Jack was one of them – took the Duke of Edinburgh croc shooting in 1956, when he was on his way to Melbourne, in the lead-up to the 1956 Olympics. And so barramundi was introduced to southern and international palates and plates.

Harmonis and Eustratios

Harmanis developed an iron ore mine south of Darwin and a wharf was built here to load and ship the ore to Japan, a forerunner of other such Australian ventures. His son Kerry went one better and developed the massive Jubilee nickel mine in Western Australia, taking the share price from one cent to $24 before selling out just weeks before the Global Financial Crisis in 2008.

On the surface this could appear a Roy’s own book full of stories about men’s adventures in the wild, however there is no denying the substantial achievements of the women in the family. Half the stories in the book are about women members, and indeed most of the written contributions come from women in the family.

During the three-month gestation of I am Darwin family members consistently amazed me with the love they exhibited for Stratos, Eleni, Louis, Helene and those who had gone before.

And if there was one particular reflection of that love, reverence and the role of the sea in our lives it was perhaps a memory from my cousin Michael Anthony about the elderly Eustratios: “I distinctly remember Papou standing on his East Point balcony watching out over the horizon for the ‘Kaiki’ (fishing boat) to return with his sons from a fishing expedition.”