

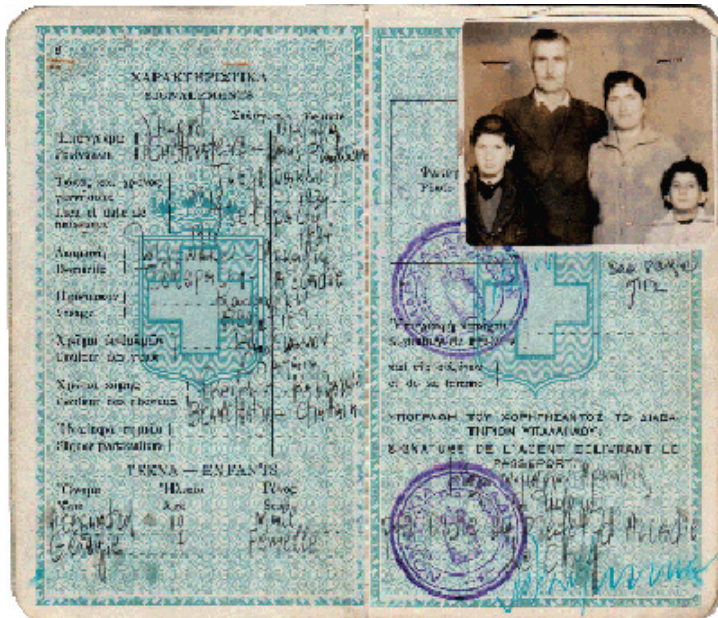
# ALEX ANDRIANOPOULOS : STUDENT 1968-1974, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT 1985-2002, SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY 1999-2002



We came to Australia on 13 December 1965, including my parents Stefanos and Giannoula Andrianopoulos and my young sister Georgia. We were some of the later waves of post war immigration. Of course there were uncles and aunties – two of my father’s brothers George and Spyros and a sister Konstantina – who came out in the fifties like many of the arrivals at the time, in my uncles’ cases as single men. My parents were married in Greece and my sister and I were born in Greece. We came in 1965 because of the dire economic circumstances that were prevailing in Greece and particularly in the villages after World War II and into the fifties and sixties. It was an act of desperation by my father and my mother to take that same step that their siblings took a decade earlier to migrate to Australia. In our village

Tselepakou in Greece they were subsistence farmers. But to see that decision in perspective, on his dying bed my father who had never revisited Greece said that emigrating was the best decision he had ever made. My parents’ decision to emigrate was to provide us children with better education and an opportunity to work. Essentially we were economic migrants. I know that many more people who came after the Second World War were in more dire circumstances but in our case it was my parents’ desire for a better life.

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We came to St Albans because both the uncles and the aunties were living in St Albans. We came straight off the boat, “The Patris” at Station Pier and were driven through some back roads and to my immediate surprise found some more remote unmade back roads into St Albans. Our relatives had bought houses there so that’s where we started our lives in Australia.

We lived with my uncle at 172 Alfrieda Street, which is in that section between Conrad and Fox streets. Despite the big adventure to migrate from Greece to the other side of the world, after arrival we stayed in the

same neighborhood – we later moved to Conrad Street and then my father built a house in Fox Street, so essentially we circled a couple of blocks. In those early days there were no made roads and there was no sewerage, but there were opportunities. We arrived on 13th December and later that week my father started working at the Rubbertex factory in Albion, a job that had been arranged for him by Andy Kratsis, yes the same Andy Kratsis that was amongst the first students at St Albans High. He is related to us through marriage as he had married my cousin Athena who

had emigrated as a 17-year-old a few years earlier. The factory closed over Christmas but after the break it was back to work and after all that's why we came here. In those days it was easy to get laboring jobs and migrants finished up in factories doing hard menial work.

The country has changed a lot in the intervening years because there is no way that we would have treated refugees as badly as we do at the moment under the policies of both major political parties. It's a completely different world with a completely different attitude to what we experienced. For me at the time it was an adventure – I was ten years old and it was all a big adventure. I think we were generally accepted. Admittedly in St Albans there were a lot of migrants and we seemed to fit in pretty well. There were some strange events and strange customs and things that were completely different to us but nevertheless we seemed to fit in far more easily and accepted far more easily than migrants are these days.

I was a little Greek ten-year-old and the only English that I spoke were the few words that I learnt to speak on the ship. Us kids were forced to go to English lessons but were taught only very basic phrases and numerals to ten.



Andrianopoulos family: Stefanos, Giannoula, Uncle George, Auntie Sofia, Uncle Spyros, Xmas 1965.

I was the odd kid out when the school year started in February 1966 because I was the only kid with a crew cut in St Albans North Primary School. My uncle and my father took me there for enrollment and for me it was a very strange environment. A vivid memory of my first day at school is going to the principal's office to be enrolled and being told that I would be put back a grade because of my lack of English, and then being taken down a corridor and shown where my classroom was before going outside and talking to other kids. We had an assembly and saluted the flag and sang God Save the Queen. I had started talking with another Greek boy so I lined up with him, but when we started marching into the classes they veered off to the other side of the corridor from my class and I was left standing there and completely lost until Mr. Eyles and his class rolled up a few minutes later.



Andrianopoulos family: Alex, Giannoula, Georgia, Stefanos, St Albans 1966.

I remember my primary school days with fondness because it was a time of soaking it all in. I was put back a grade because in those days there were no teacher aides to help newcomers. To add to my embarrassment on my first day there the teacher made me sit next to a girl, Helen Mayfosh, who also spoke Greek, so she could explain to me what was going on. Helen became my defacto tutor in the English language and it became a period of intensive learning for me. The following year I was put into a combined class of grades four, five and six, so essentially I caught up with my peers. After this the teachers thought I was ready to tackle high school, which I did in 1968. I don't remember having too many problems with English after that first year.

Mrs Audrey Ginifer was a teacher at the North Primary; she was the wife of Jack Ginifer who was a teacher before he went into parliament. I think Jack might have been going into politics during the time I was at the Primary School. I had no way of knowing that I would end up following in his footsteps. He passed away many years ago but I still see Mrs Ginifer occasionally and we always shake hands because she still recognizes me as being one of the kids at North Primary School.

The other good thing about opportunities in those days was that for kids that did not want to be pushed into academic streams, job opportunities were available through apprenticeships and a lot of kids took advantage of that. In those days striving to be a bank teller was seen as a good career choice. When I was thinking of doing accounting, going to work in a bank was seen as a great choice. Who wasn't happy with that?

I started at St Albans High School in 1968 and in those early years it was all about learning. We were pushed to learn – that came both from home and from the teachers. To me the high school looked huge in comparison to the primary school and certainly compared to the village school that I'd attended in Greece. When I look back at it the overall numbers were not that great but we were in big classrooms of thirty students or more. Therefore, you tended to be hidden in the crowd, unlike today where there are much smaller class sizes. Nevertheless, I was a reasonably good student and my school reports indicated that I was attentive. Did I enjoy going through school? I think I did; it was not a bad experience. Did I experience racism? No. Did I experience bullying? No. Did I experience pushing and fighting and the strap? Yes.

I remember Mr. Shaw was the disciplinarian; I think he was one of the deputy principals. One day I shoved Ilio Di Paolo into the lockers, and of course I was given six of the best as a consequence. But those were the rules, and to be called to the Deputy Principal's office for six of the best was part of the learning experience.

I remember some of the teachers in my first years there were a bit like us – they were migrants: Mrs. Sturesteps, Mr. Malanuik, Mr. Korinfsky, Mr. Havez the math teacher, and Mr. Sheltawi. I remember the migrant teachers more than I remember the ones who had arrived a generation or so earlier with Anglo names. None the less two come to mind Mr. MacLeish my English teacher and a Marathon enthusiast and Mr. Hope. The most memorable teacher for me was Stan Hope who was teaching accounting and legal studies. He more than anybody else influenced me to follow the accounting-commerce field. He was such an inspirational teacher. He took a dry subject like accounting and made it fascinating and interesting and you wanted to learn and participate more and more in his classes. Of all my teachers he was the most influential in my formative years at the school. One of the interesting things that I developed in about Form 3 or 4 is a liking for the races. The old TAB was in the arcade where we were not supposed to go – we know it went on and even now it goes on all the time – but Mr. Hope was the only one who was unconcerned.

I enjoyed accounting and legal studies. I still remember Mr. Hope's statements about "What would a reasonable man do?" The old "reasonable man" principle has held me in good stead throughout my life and political career, because I've always tried to see issues from the other point of view, how someone who is not immersed in the situation might react.

My later years at high school get a bit murky. Although I had a fairly standard level of educational progress and behavior, it seemed to go a bit astray when the hormones kicked in. Let's just say that some in the peer group were not academically inclined and I fell into the trap: we smoked, we drank, and we played around, but nothing major or criminal. One of the guys had a car so we sometimes disappeared for a drive. That was probably the worst of our escapades. There was a group of us playing cards, probably this started about Form 4, and inevitably there were one- and two-cent pieces involved and we were caught. The teacher who caught us lined us up and asked of each of us: "Were you gambling?" "No sir." "Were you gambling?" "No sir." "Were you gambling?" "Yes sir." I think we got six each on that occasion.

Form 6 was my worst year in learning achievement and I consequently failed my first attempt at HSC. My father got stuck into me for that failure because he said that is not why we came to Australia and you can't fail school. The family pressure was judicially applied – the uncles were called in for the lectures so there was very little choice apart for having to do better. I repeated the year in 1974 and passed, much to the relief of the extended family. If it wasn't for my parents' insistence getting me back to school I don't what would have happened to me, so thank goodness for their action.

My career was mapped more by circumstance than design on my part. After high school I enrolled in accounting at the Footscray Institute of Technology but my studies there were disrupted early in my first year when I lost an eye. There was bleeding behind the eye so the eye was removed, though these days that is an operable condition. As a result of that I missed out that year at FIT. I went back the following year but my age and financial circumstances came into play. I obtained my first official job at Claude Neon, in the latter part of 1975; they were in Moonee Ponds near the junction. It was an office job and my role was to match invoices with delivery dockets and process payments. It was an administrative job that is probably all done electronically these days. The following year, 1976, I got a job at Modern Maid in Footscray, first in accounts and then in the pay office. At that time the pay office was a biggish operation. It

was all manually operated. The old “Kalamazoo” sheets where pays were calculated and pay details sent to Armaguard who put cash into pay envelopes and we then handed to employees every Thursday. I stayed there for about six years.

The seventies were exciting times in the western region, politically speaking, because of the 1972 Federal elections and the ascendancy of Gough Whitlam's Australian Labor Party team. Locally, voters were very pro-Labor and Dr Jim Cairns was a popular figure on the federal campaign hustings. At the state level, Jack Ginifer had his electorate office in St Albans; he was so popular as the local MP that he polled 75% of the vote for the Keilor electorate. Jack was always supportive of local initiatives and he backed the development of Migrant English Classes that had been initiated by the St Albans Community Youth Club. Regionally, the formation of groups such as the Western Region Commission and the Western Region Council for Social Development enabled grass roots participation in allocation of funds for community development projects, leading to local initiatives such as the community centre and the community health centre. This was probably the mid-seventies.



About the time I was at FIT, Medibank now Medicare was just being introduced and a hot topic, and my uncle Spyros who was involved with the St Albans branch of the Labor Party got me interested and active. In 1974 on the day that my grandparents visited from Greece I was helping my uncle hand out how-to-vote cards in that year's election. Gough Whitlam was elected in 1972 and had to go to a double dissolution election in 1974, and that was the beginning of my practical involvement in politics. 1975 was the defining moment for me politically speaking because of

Whitlam's sacking. Coming from Europe we knew about dictatorships because countries were still experiencing and suffering such regimes and I could not accept that the democratically elected Australian government could have been deposed the way it was. That more than any other reason is why I became involved and enmeshed in Labor Party affairs.

In those days, branch meetings were lively events: there was discussion of issues, motions for action, and lots of debate about local and broader events whereas these days' branches seem to be used as voting blocks. In the seventies the meetings were more vital. Early in the seventies the branch meetings were held in the bungalow at the back of George Attard's place in Henry Street. When I joined, the meetings were in the church hall in Alexina Street, because they needed a bigger place.

Those were the days of George Seitz, Howard Brown, Ken Hovenga, Colin Thorpe, Lorna Cameron, Sue Lockwood, Alan Rowbottom from Deer Park, and George Attard of course, a very reasoned and measured man, always a calming influence, used to work on the wharves and the railways. These were the days of resurgent interest in the Labor Party in St Albans. It came on the back of coming out of the Vietnam war and having Jim Cairns as the local federal member; to me he will always be an idol because of the social equality that he pursued. They were dynamic times. Howard had just been elected to Sunshine Council where people like Ian Mill had a strong Labor influence. Factionalism started to become more visible about that time

and I remember being lectured by Howard on the evils of Jack Tighe and the Deer Park branch - the old Deer Park “evil empire” was supposed to be headed by Bon Thomas and Jack Tighe.

Despite such distractions and shenanigans, St Albans people became involved with the “Bring Back Democracy to Keilor” movement, because Keilor Council had been sacked about 1976 and Commissioner Kevin Holland was installed to run the council. Part of our intent was to monitor the running of council affairs where Holland would be making all the decisions on his own at the public “council” meetings. A movement started about returning democracy to the council and finally the government approved this for 1980. Of course a team of candidates was sought for election to Keilor Council. I was 25 at the time and part of the election strategy was “Alex, you will run third on the ticket. You will not be elected but we need to run a full ticket.” Charlie Apap was number one on the ticket, Maria Biewer was second, and I was third. Well, the whole ticket got elected, so St Albans had the full three Labor councilors as local representatives and Charlie Apap was elected Mayor.

At the age of 25, I was the youngest member on the council and I like to think that I was the most vibrant, tackling all sorts of issues. Being a councilor was interesting but there’s always been some odd lines about keeping politics out of local government, which is really arguing to keep politics out of politics. Labor candidates generally acknowledge their party affiliations whereas Liberal candidates often say they run as “Independents” as if their Liberal Party membership has no relevance. It’s a political game they’ve played a long time. There were some non-Labor people elected to council but they were in the minority.

During my time in council I was influenced or guided by advice from people like Ken Hovenga, Colin Thorpe, Evelyn Thorpe and Lorna Cameron, among others. I remember one of the issues we wanted to take up was social services and welfare. We had a town clerk in Richard Kelly who was as establishment as they come, who used to tell the council there was no need for a welfare department in Keilor because the town was doing extremely well. In fact, growing up in St Albans you could see there was a very real need. One of the first things we did was set up a unit within Keilor Council and employed Linda Watkinson and Evelyn Thorpe to manage it. That was the humble beginnings of the social services department in Keilor. Of course, roads, rates and garbage were still the major issues of the time.

I remember in the first few months of that council that this mob of protesters led by Jack Sheridan and Beryl Fitzgerald came to protest about the state of Sunshine Avenue. Charlie Apap’s solution to coping with the protesters was to order me outside to listen to their grievances. Charlie put a halt to the normal council proceedings while I went out and talked to the people, so I was more or less thrown into the fire despite my limited experience. We had frank discussions, I heard their concerns, and I must admit that Jack Sheridan helped by calming the atmosphere. He was a good man who passed away just recently and there were a lot of people at his funeral. When the road reconstruction project was approved it was an excellent result for everybody. We also fixed the old road between Keilor and St Albans, the steep and winding Green Gully road that ran many cars and bicycles to calamity over its box thorn and scotch thistle slopes.

One of the first things we did as a council, led by Charlie Apap, was to criticize Commissioner Holland for purchasing the land near the freeway for a golf course. These days of course the golf course is very popular and I use it quite regularly with my old St Albans mates. Oh the irony.

The important events in my moving from local council to state politics was in the early eighties. George Seitz stood against Jack Ginifer for preselection prior to the 1982 election when Jack was the sitting member. This sort of challenge against a sitting party colleague was unheard of in those days. There were some technical problems at the first ballot and it was declared a tied vote, so

there was a second ballot and Jack regained his pre-selection. After Labor was elected to government at the state election, Jack Ginifer was sworn in as a minister in the Cain Government, but was soon diagnosed with inoperable cancer so he resigned and died within a few months of being sworn in. There was a bitter pre-selection contest after that where George Seitz was successful and became the Member for Keilor.

At that time, I was working in the pay office at Modern Maid and had climbed up the ranks. Computer technology was being introduced and the pay office staff had been reduced from five to one, which was me as paymaster. We were no longer using the Kalamazoo system of manual calculations but inputting data into a computer in Richmond. My job was to collate people's times and take the results to Richmond as input for the computer. When George Seitz was elected he was looking for an electorate officer and offered the position to me. My parents and I held a family conference, including the uncles, to consider whether I should leave a steady, responsible position as paymaster looking after 450 employees to go into the realm of politics which was a bit of an unknown. My uncle advised me that if I went for politics I would have to become fully involved not just the part-time nature of my current commitment. I wrestled with the decision because I could see my role as paymaster was becoming pretty mundane and I was more or less a data entry person rather than working in accountancy, so I decided to take the risk. Salary-wise there was little change but working for George would give me more time in my role as Keilor councilor, so that's what I decided to do.

This introduced me to the hurly burly of state politics as an electorate officer in responding to people, dealing with all office administrative requirements and working on legislative matters. I was fully enmeshed in 1984 when the redistribution of boundaries occurred and Keilor was divided into the seats of Keilor and St Albans. The pre-selection for the new seat became a contest between myself and Adrian Bishop. I won pre-selection on the three votes that were delivered by Jack Tighe, so the Deer Park so-called evil empire was my salvation. Alf Leckie's was one of the votes that got me in, and Alf was always a stalwart Labor man. It was always a close contest at such pre-selections because half the votes were from locals and the other half from central delegates. The rest is history. Did I happen to be at the right place at the right time? There is no doubt about that. Did I engineer to be at the right place at the right time? No – it was just circumstances and events combining. Do I have a luck streak? Perhaps, but those decisions about following through with my education and taking the risk for a new career direction paid off.

At this stage the population of St Albans had reached about 50,000 people which meant that the district was bigger than cities such as Footscray, Melton, and Williamstown. With regard to local government, 60% of St Albans' population came under Keilor council and 40% under Sunshine council, so the district's political clout at the municipal level was still divided. Regarding ethnic composition, half of the St Albans residents were Australian-born, but, significantly, about three-quarters of the older people were born overseas - the cosmopolitan diversity of St Albans still prevailed.

I represented the seat of St Albans from 1985 until the redistribution of electoral boundaries in 1992 when the seat was abolished. I was then elected to parliament as the member for Mill Park. I became the Shadow Minister for Ethnic Affairs during 1993, a position that was previously held by the late Jack Ginifer and I served two stints as Secretary to the Shadow Cabinet: from October 1992 to March 1993, and from December 1993 to October 1999.

How I became the Speaker of the House ... It was 1999 and Jeff Kennett was the all powerful Premier. There was an election due and John Brumby was leader of the Labor Party in Victoria but his popularity in the polls was not high. Steve Bracks was then selected as the new leader. Perhaps to everyone's surprise, the Bracks alternative government was elected. A couple of

independents had been elected, and initially there was no clear winner between the major political parties, and Peter McLellan the Liberal member for Frankston died unexpectedly, which necessitated a re-election for that seat. There was a big hiatus of who was going to form the government and there were many meetings with the independents who were integral to forming the majority. A National Party member was asked to be Speaker and I was to be Deputy Speaker. That seemed pretty settled and when Labor won the Frankston re-election we could just form the majority. At the last moment the National Party member withdrew from the arrangement regarding his nomination for Speaker. It was all on again for the position. Judy Maddigan, the Member for Essendon, was very supportive of me but George Seitz was also keen to have the position. In the end I received unanimous support and was elevated to Speaker of the Legislative Assembly with Judy as the Deputy.

I was the first migrant from a non-English speaking background to be elected Speaker of the Victorian Parliament and the second MP of Greek background to be Speaker in Australia. This was seen as a significant achievement for a member of the NESB (Non English-Speaking Background) community though before long this terminology was changed to refer to people of CALD (Cultural and Linguistic Diversity) background.

I think I survived my time as Speaker very well. I believe I was respected by all sides of the House including the Libs because I was not an extremist and allowed parliament to run fairly. I decided to do the right thing by not staying too long – I did a term and then retired and Judy Maddigan became the first ever female Speaker of the Legislative Assembly between 2003 and 2007.

Unfortunately, my dad died of lung cancer in 1987 and did not see me in that parliamentary position, but he'd lived long enough to see me elected, to see me being sworn in, and one time he visited me in parliament house. I know he was proud of me and that's why in his final days he said migrating to Australia was the best decision he had ever made. My mum did see me in parliament and she is still alive. When I became Speaker, Chris Evans, who was a local reporter, insisted that I come to Fox Street and have a photo taken with mum to commemorate the occasion.





One of my parliamentary colleagues was Robert Clarke who was also from St Albans and attended the High School for a while in the late sixties when I was there. I noticed that on his CV he always acknowledged his St Albans heritage, which I thought was great. He and I went in different political directions as he joined the Liberal Party. We did a couple of presentations together at the high school during the time it became known as St Albans Secondary College and we were there for the 40th anniversary celebration in 1996. I remember that Andy Kratsis was present at these events; I think he was President of the School Council at the time. He was one of the first students at the High School when it started in 1956 and he has devoted a lot of his time in supporting the College ever since; you have to admire that dedication.

One of the nicest presentations I attended at the College was in 1990 when Joan Kirner was the Minister for Education. I think that was just before she became the first female Premier of Victoria.



Renaming St Albans High School as St Albans Secondary College, 1990. (L-R): Alex Andrianopoulos (1968-73), Andy Kratsis (1956-61), Natalie Cvjeticanin, Laurie Schwab (1960-65), and Loue Traianou (1963-69) with Joan Kirner, Minister for Education.

As proud as I am of all my achievements in Politics, I look back and cherish my time as the member for St Albans. I was part of a reformist government that did so much for workers in the areas of occupational health and safety and Workcover.

At the local level I am proudest of my work and advocacy in ensuring that major infrastructure projects were delivered to the electorate. Sunshine Hospital became a reality. I worked on the Prince Henry Hospital relocation committee to ensure that not all resources went to Oakleigh but a fair share was allocated to Sunshine. The dream became a reality with the opening of the Hospital. Two other huge infrastructure projects that I am proud to have been involved with and that have transformed St Albans and the Western suburbs were of course the commencement of

construction of the Western Ring road in 1988 and the advent of Victoria University.

During my time we celebrated the Centenary of St Albans Railway Station in 1987 and of course the other dream was the undergrounding of the railway line. We did not quite manage that but I am glad to see that some 30 years later that is also becoming a reality. I look forward to that celebration in the next year or so.

I retired from politics in 2003. I believe that you can stay in politics for too long. I initially thought that fifteen years was a good term. I retired after twenty-one years – seventeen years in state parliament and four years on the council. I see politics as always evolving and therefore it must always be representative of the contemporary community. I see some politicians staying too long and view being a politician as a lifelong position. I've seen in Greece where you have had these generational dynasties, and let's admit it some entrenched political arrangements become unproductive and self-serving.



Alex Andrianopoulos with Steve Bracks and Parliament sitting at Bendigo, 2001.

After quitting politics, we went to live in Greece and put our daughter through a Greek kindergarten – that was in Kalamata which is on the beautiful Peloponnese peninsula and about 80 kilometers away from my old village. This extended holiday was partly to have a clean break from political life. I said to Lily D'Ambrosio, who was my successor at Mill Park, that she would not see me at any branch meetings and so forth for the reason that it could only be a distracting and disturbing influence for her as the new member.

Since we came back to Australia, I have worked in property renewal and re-development. Projects have included some flats and shops in Fairfield. The government appointed me as Chair of VITS: The Victorian Interpreter and Translation Service, which I did for six years. Last year, I was the volunteer bus driver for my mum's nursing home until bureaucracy caught up with us. Under the regulations they have to have two qualified staff for outings, but with the volunteer

driver as an extra person it left less space for the participants and their wheelchairs. I remember fondly my year of doing that every Thursday, taking people to places like the beach at Altona. There was one elderly man on this cold and windy day and he was the only one who wanted to get out of the bus saying this was probably his last visit to the beach. He insisted so I accompanied him. He did it and about three weeks later he died, so I'm glad I helped him when I could. I really enjoyed my experience as a volunteer with elderly people in providing a bit of joy through outings to places like Bacchus Marsh, Gisborne, Altona, and Brimbank Park.

My sister Georgia also went to St Albans High School and started there in 1971. She went to about Form 5 and then started working at the old Melbourne Stock Exchange when it was still being operated manually. She met and married John Vathis who had the responsibility to write up the sales on the old boards using chalk. She then went on to have a long and rewarding career working for the AEC for over 25 years.

Since my youth, I have resided in Keilor Downs, Mill Park, and Kalamata, and currently I live with my wife Virginia and daughter Johanna in North Balwyn.

However, I consider two places to be home, that is the place I was born in, my village Tselepakou in Greece, and the place I grew up in, St Albans. Although the character of St Albans has changed dramatically since I arrived in 1965, Alfrieda street, Conrad street, and Fox street is where I come from.



**Alex Andrianopoulos**  
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