STUDENTS FROM ST ALBANS HIGH SCHOOL
1950s – 1960s

Table of Contents

Albert Achterberg: Bank Worker

Mum, Dad, two sisters, and two brothers arrived in Australia on the 10th September 1960. We were from Holland and came under the Netherland and Australia Migration Agreement. After spending our initial time in the Bonegilla migrant camp and then in the Maribyrnong Hostel, we came to St.Albans in 1961.

There I first attended St Albans Primary School in Year 6.

In 1962 I attended the first grade at St. Albans High School. In those days we nearly all walked to school and some of the lucky ones had a bike. Parts of Main Road West and Main Road East were unmade roads with open gutters.

By the time I went to the high school I was able to converse well in English, however it was still a case of "pick the Aussie" as the school was mainly made up of migrant students.

Albert Achteberg (back row, five from right) with Mrs Krikscunis, Form 1L, 1962.

Highlights of my school years included:

- Photography Club, conducted at lunch time by Mr Ziemelis. He certainly was a great influence on my life as I continued doing part-time professional photography for the next 30 odd years.
- School Banking on a Tuesday – this was where students were able to do their Banking with the State Bank of Victoria – students set up the student banking. Ironic that I ended up working for the State Bank (subsequently the Commonwealth Bank) for a period of 36.5 years.

The school held a large fete in 1965 to raise funds for the new hall. All classes were given a challenge to come up with the biggest fundraising for the day.

Our class had a sweet stall and we managed to get a lot of the sweets donated. Mr McLeish ran a log fight on the day and sure attracted a lot of the fellows who wanted to give him a hiding. Our class won the competition and we ended up on a school trip to Mt Martha.

Fund raising fete for school hall, 1964.

I left the high school in 1965 and commenced in the Bank one week after decimal conversion on the 21st February 1966. In 2003 the Bank offered me a nice redundancy package and since then I have been enjoying a semi retirement.

Currently I am married to Rebecca since 1972 and we have two children: Roseanne 33 and Andrew 31. Andrew is married to Amanda and gave us our first granddaughter in 2004.

I have been involved with Rotary International for a number of years. Currently I am the secretary for district 9790, and have also been involved with bookkeeping for the group.

Albert Achterberg, 2005

Marilyn Anderson nee Hulett: Professor of Biochemistry, Order of Australia 2016

I was born in Deer Park, a suburb that was established in the 1870s as a site for the manufacture of explosives for the goldfields in Ballarat and Bendigo. It was located exactly 12 miles from the centre of Melbourne so management could make the trip from the city centre to the factory and back in a day, a distance that could be comfortably covered by horse and carriage. Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) took over the factory in 1928 and the factory expanded during World War II and over the following years as Australia's mining industry grew.

My father worked at ICI and even though he wasn't a scientist he was involved in the manufacture of chemicals and explosives. During my childhood, most of the people who lived in Deer Park worked for ICI and their children expected to find employment there when they finished school. My brothers were sent off to do apprenticeships and learn a trade, an option that was not available to a girl. I did not know any women who stayed in the workforce after they were married. I thus had freedom to study whatever I liked during my education at primary and secondary school as I was not expected to have a career. But when I came to the decision in secondary school of whether to do history, art or science, my father encouraged me to take the challenge and do science.

My father was an inspiration. He was born with a heart defect and his family was told he wouldn't survive childhood. He missed primary school and had only a couple of years at secondary school, but he was smart and made his way up to the level of engineer in ICI without a university degree. He used to sit at the kitchen table with my two brothers and ask questions like what's the area of a circle? I remember on my first day of school I went to the teacher and said "The area of a circle is Pi r squared." I thought you needed to know that to be successful at school.

I did well at school, driven by natural curiosity and quite a bit of boredom when I was home. I collected tadpoles and nurtured them until they turned into frogs and I learnt to love plants as I followed my mother around the garden. I gathered some concepts from Sunday school that I could not understand. They still bother me. Just how long is eternity and how far is infinity? I enjoyed the broad range of subjects at school and found humanities and science of equal interest. I started at the St Albans High School in 1962 and went through to 1967. The first big decision that set me on the path to becoming a biochemist was when I had to choose between the science and humanities stream at the end of year 10. My father, inspired by his career in the chemical industry, encouraged me to take the tougher option and do science. How strange when he did not encourage his own sons to do the same.

In the final year at St Albans High I was a prefect as well as being on the school magazine committee and playing in the girl's hockey team. The magazine was a challenge because an official school magazine had not been published for several years. Mr Ziemelis, one of the senior teachers who taught German and was the school's unofficial photographer, was our guide and mentor; other students on this group included Maija Svars, Leo Dobes, Joachim Simovic and David Beighton. I'm happy to confirm that Alba was definitely published that year.

Alba team: Leo Dobes, Maija Svars, Joachim Simovic, Marilyn Hulett, David Beighton, 1967.

As I approached the end of secondary school my teachers encouraged me to apply for University entrance. This was truly foreign ground to me, because no one in my family had been to university and I didn't imagine I would go to because I didn't know anyone who had been to university. But my school friends were children of immigrants who had been displaced from northern Europe after the war. Most of their parents had been tertiary educated but their qualifications weren't recognised in Australia. This made them heavily committed to getting a good education for their children. My best friend was Latvian and practised piano and violin for

five hours a day. It made me realise I could aim for more than I had been exposed to in my non-immigrant household.

Marilyn Hulett (front left) and other prefects with Alison Gliddon, Brian Torpey, Ivan Matthews, 1967.

I was familiar with the University of Melbourne campus because I often played hockey there. We had a good hockey team at St Albans High in 1967: we went through the year undefeated and beat the winning team of the other section in the final. The team members included Lila Smith, Maija Svars, Elizabeth Prince, Ronda Wheelhouse, Gina Kosiak, Helga Fuchs, Olga Susko, Judith Barnes, Bridget Deutsch and Brigitte Linhart. I also went to Melbourne Uni for the German poetry competitions and oral exams, so I dared to dream of going to university. This shows the value of bringing young students onto campus.

Marilyn Hulett (centre) practicing hockey skills 1967

Marilyn Hulett (far right) with the undefeated hockey team and coach Mr Maplestone, 1967.

I did have the opportunity to go to university and signed up for a science degree because I never dreamt that anyone like me could do medicine or law. I got into science and I absolutely loved it. I started my science degree at the University of Melbourne in 1968. My first year there was one of the best years of my life. I remember my first lecture on biology when Dr Gretna Weste introduced cells. I was enthralled. I ran over and bought my first text book "The Cell" by C.P. Swanson and devoured it over the next few days. Peering through the microscope at cells in my first practical class I drew my first cell with great attention to detail and was terribly disappointed when Dr Weste informed me that I had drawn a perfect air bubble! Looking back I think that was the most life-changing year for me. I still thought I was going to fail because I was from the western suburbs and almost everybody else was from a private school. I was stunned when I did well in my first-year exams. After that I immersed myself in university life and moved into Janet Clarke Hall for the full university experience.

When I started at university I was going to do chemistry because that's what I did at ICI for my summer jobs. First-year biology opened up an entirely new world but I did not think it would lead to a career. I just assumed I would be a chemist and go back to work for ICI or become a secondary school teacher. Growing up in Deer Park and being part of the "ICI family" had been handy because I was given summer work in their chemistry laboratories from the end of high school to the end of my undergraduate studies at University. I started in the ammunition factory working out the copper content in the brass used for the casings.

The following three years I spent my summers in the laboratories at the urea-formaldehyde plastics factory and in my final year I moved onto the Central Research Laboratories for ICI. This institute housed about 100 research chemists and was one the major employers of PhD chemists in Australia at the time. I joined the team that was working on the synthesis of a new nematicide for sheep called tetramisole. I spent the summer immersed in organic synthesis and was rigorously trained in safety procedures. Indeed, I dropped to the floor immediately when we had our only incident. The coffee pot had exploded!

But then I was introduced to biochemistry. It was a relatively new subject in those days and

I found it really exciting. At the end of third year I had the choice of doing honours in chemistry or biochemistry and decided to do biochemistry. Biochemistry was a better environment for women than chemistry in those days. The lecturers and tutors were inspiring - Mary-Jane Gething was my tutor when I was in college and I thought she was fantastic. In those days there were strict quotas to get into second year, third year and honours biochemistry. Not everyone could get in, so you felt privileged if you did. When I went on to do honours with Bruce Stone, he handed me Elizabeth Blackburn's and Mary-Jane Gething's laboratory books from projects they had done in his lab a couple of years earlier. That was what I built my honours project on.

It's pretty amazing now to look back and think I was following on from a future Nobel Prize winner. In 1971 when I was an honours student I joined the Australian Biochemistry Society, which is now the Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB). Attendance at the annual conference was part of our honours program and Syd Leach had run a course to prepare us for the plenary lecture on protein folding by Harold Sheraga. The whole honours class travelled to Brisbane by train, which took two days!

I applied to do a PhD at Melbourne University with Bruce Stone. At the end of my honours year he accepted the position as inaugural Professor of Biochemistry at La Trobe University. He moved his lab out to La Trobe and we all followed. Bruce trained several successful biochemists who have been members of the ASBMB for a long time, including Geoff Fincher, Tony Bacic, Adrienne Clark, Robert Henry and Robin Anderson. My PhD project was focused on polysaccharide chemistry and the specificity of the enzymes that break them down. That was in the days before 'molecular biology', although Bruce insisted that we had always been molecular biologists.

Then I went overseas to do a postdoc and took up molecular biology. In those days almost every PhD student who wanted to continue in science would look overseas for a postdoc. I wanted to continue in carbohydrate chemistry so I went to The School of Medicine at the University of Miami where there was a big cluster of carbohydrate chemists in a unit headed by Bill Whelan. He started The Miami Winter Symposium, which is now in its 47th year. It was at those meetings that I first heard about the newly emerging field of molecular biology from scientists like Francis Crick, James Watson, Paul Berg and Phil Sharp. They inspired me to move fields from carbohydrate chemistry to molecular biology. It was the mid-1970s, just as scientists in the USA called for a national moratorium on DNA cloning. For the rest of the time that I was in Miami, no cloning was done whilst this voluntary group of scientists evaluated whether gene cloning was safe. We still did a lot of work with DNA but we weren't cloning. I was trying to use SV40 virus to create an immortal line of insulin-producing pancreatic cells. I met and worked with William Rutter, who had developed techniques for isolation of RNA from pancreas. This technology was very useful later in my career.

Marilyn and Bruce Anderson (left) with Francis Crick (right of centre), Miami.

Joe Sambrook, who was deputy director at Cold Spring Harbour Laboratory, came to Miami for a student symposium. He heard my husband talk and offered him a job, so I went with my husband to Cold Spring Harbour and continued working on oncogenes in adenovirus, another DNA tumour virus. Many people worked on adenovirus and SV40 virus in the early days of molecular biology.

When we got to Cold Spring Harbour, the moratorium on gene cloning was lifted. My husband Bruce Anderson was working with James Watson and Joe Sambrook, firstly on the cloning of middle T (later renamed p53) and then on the cloning of plasminogen activator. I was working with Bill Topp in the same building.

It was an amazing environment to work in, but there was a complication because I had had a child - so when I turned up at Cold Spring Harbour I had an 18-month-old child. At that time there were very few women working in science who had children. I knew Barbara McClintock well and we talked a lot. The advice she gave me about how to succeed as a woman in science was not to get married or have children. Times were just starting to change, and I got a job at Cold Spring Harbour. But even though I worked every day and all weekend I was still, relative to men, regarded as not as serious. In

some way that gave me more freedom because the men were under a lot of pressure.

In 1982, when our son was four years old, Bruce and I decided to come back to Australia. We had been away for seven years and my mother was very sick. Bruce got a job with Ian Gust at the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital to do virology research, set up molecular biology there and cloned the hepatitis A virus.

I decided to work with Adrienne Clark, who had received funding from one of the first rounds of ARC Centres of Excellence. Adrienne could guarantee me five years of funding and the stability that offered us was one of the reasons we came home. I think I would still be in the US if that hadn't happened. I had a green card - in fact, James Watson was my referee for the green card. So we decided to come back for two years, and then our green cards would still be valid, and I could head back to the US and pick up where I had left off if things did not work out.

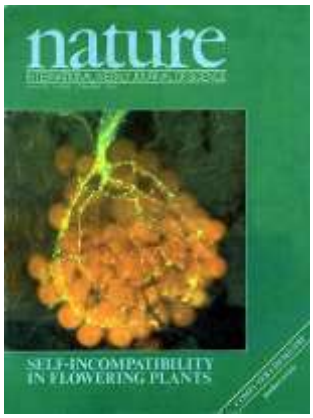
[Marilyn and Bruce Anderson, 2003.]

I came back to work with Adrienne and hopped right into plant biology. People often think I am a plant biologist but I hadn't really worked with plants before. My work with Bruce Stone had been focused on carbohydrate chemistry and enzymes. Adrienne had a fundamental and important biological question and James Watson had said to us: "If you are going to do basic science ask a big question, don't just tinker on the edges."

Adrienne's question was on self-incompatibility in plants; that is, how do most flowering plants recognise and reject self-pollen so they are forced to outbreed? This question had been posed by Charles Darwin 100 years earlier. He wrote a book on it and used this phenomenon as evidence for the requirement of outbreeding for hybrid vigour and survival of the fittest. Although people knew the genetics behind it, the genes and the proteins that were responsible had not been isolated.

Even though I'd been working with viruses and oncogenes, Adrienne thought somebody from an entirely different field with new technology might help solve this problem. Very fortunately, we cloned the gene that controlled self-incompatibility within two years. It turned out to be one of the first major and important plant genes to be cloned - we published in Nature and got the front cover. We discovered that the female tissues rejected self-pollen by making a ribonuclease that could enter the self-pollen and kill it by breaking down the RNA.

The scientific community around the 'Parkville Strip' really contributed to our success. I was a bit of a gypsy when I first returned from the US. I would walk over and talk to people at the WEHI, the Howard Florey and Ian McKenzie's group in the Pathology Department at Melbourne University, and they would invite me into their labs to work. We would share techniques and they gave me access to their resources. Without that we would not have cloned the gene. I look back at it and think what amazing times they were. I wouldn't have been prepared for it if I hadn't worked at Cold Spring Harbour in the early days of molecular biology.



We followed that first paper with another two Nature papers. It shows the advantages that special research centres can offer. I stayed there for about 13 years. With regard to switching from working in animals to plants, what was so coincidental was that I made RNA from the female tissue of the flower using the same methods that I had used for pancreas when I was working with Bill Rutter. Pancreas is full of ribonucleases that break down RNA so we had to take extra precautions to inactivate them.

When I was working with flowers, they turned out to be full of ribonucleases like the pancreas. So I used the method I had learnt in the animal field. That was the big breakthrough that enabled us to isolate the good quality RNA that we used for cloning. When we first sequenced the gene we didn't know it was a ribonuclease. We found that out because our collaborator, Richard Simpson, was working with a colleague from Japan who had just cloned a ribonuclease gene from a microorganism. When he lined up the sequence of his gene with the sequence of ours we could see regions of homology, and that led us to ask whether it was a ribonuclease and it was!

Once we cloned the self-incompatibility gene we attracted a series of very good postdocs to the lab and we had a lot of very good questions to pursue. We had excellent facilities in Melbourne and we had international recognition for our work. Furthermore, my husband had managed to clone the hepatitis A virus so he was enjoying his work as well. We decided to stay in Australia.

Adrienne Clark and I establish the agribiotech company Hexima in 1998. Hexima has existed in different forms, but it really started in 1997 when we had our first employees. We now have 36 scientists and about five administrative people. We floated on the ASX in 2007 and raised $40 million. We delisted because the climate is too volatile for a small biotech on the ASX.

We became involved with investors and patents very early on. In the first year that I was back in Australia, Adrienne Clarke had received funds from one of the world's first plant biotechnology companies, Agrigenetics, for the self-incompatibility work. Agrigenetics was founded on venture capital money from Hollywood actors who formed an investment group called the nematodes in the early 1980s. They had a couple of business people who chose the projects to bring into Agrigenetics, such as the first transgenic plants with the insecticidal gene, Bt Toxin, agrobacterium-mediated transformation and our self-incompatibility work, amongst others. Some of the most valuable patents in plant biotechnology came from that original company.

When we were working on pollen and how it grew, we realised that female plant reproductive tissues were rarely infected by microorganisms, even when the rest of the plant had an infection. I applied for an ARC research fellowship to look at molecules that protect the flower from invading microorganisms and damage from insects. I identified some molecules, we put some patents in and it's really from that work that Hexima was founded. It started off with protease inhibitors. We found that they are good insecticidal molecules that protect the female flower from insect damage. Then we found some potent antifungal molecules and the work has broadened.

Most of the Hexima work that has generated commercial interest has been our antifungal technology. We've had a five-year program with DuPont Pioneer to enhance disease resistance in corn by applying this work. We've just signed a new five-year contract with them to go back and start working on insects. We have generated plants with enhanced resistance to some of the major corn diseases and the seed is now going through field trials in the US.

About three years ago we moved just about everyone from Melbourne to La Trobe University. My memories of La Trobe began before I was a student there. When I was a first year student at Melbourne University and my boyfriend Bruce Anderson had his first car we drove all the way out to La Trobe which seemed to be the end of the world to me to have a look at this exciting new campus. This had been in the late 1960s so coming back in the 1990s there had been a lot of change in the meantime. We built a large greenhouse at La Trobe for production of transgenic corn with our antifungal molecules. We have a very efficient system for generating and testing the plants. We can make and test 10,000 transgenic plants per year.

Now we have gene constructs that make two or three different proteins so they can hit different targets to control levels of resistance and provide more broad spectrum control - the aim is to give plants resistance to all the major fungal diseases. We are going to keep working at making Hexima successful. We are now looking at human applications for some of our technology.

Marilyn Anderson receiving Lemberg Medal 2014

I think it is really important for scientists to learn business skills as we are asked more and more to focus on translation of our research. We are training people who can span business and science. We are still very interested in basic research because we are university based. It is important to us that we get academic publications and we are still writing grant applications to support basic research.

Our students do basic research but they get to see how a company runs, they get some training and understanding of IP, how contracts work and so forth. Nicole van der Weerden, who is now our COO, was a PhD student with us. She went off and did an MBA and has come back.

I feel very honoured to be the 2014 Lemberg medallist, 43 years after I attended my first meeting as a starry-eyed honours student. Syd Leach's preparation and Harold Sheraga's plenary lecture started a love of proteins that has stayed with me throughout my career. Fortunately, I will be flying to Canberra and will

not have to travel on the Brisbane Limited Express.

Note: The Lemberg Medal is awarded to a distinguished member of the Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology who will present the Lemberg Lecture at the ComBio meeting. The Medal is presented in memory of Emeritus Professor M.R. Lemberg who was the Society's first President and Honorary Member. The award is made to an individual who has demonstrated excellence in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and who has made significant contributions to the scientific community.

Professional affiliations include:

- Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science (FAA);
- Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering;
- Chief Science Officer of Hexima Ltd (since 2009);
- Founder and past Director on the Board of Hexima Ltd;
- Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (FAICD);
- Director on the Board of City West Water Ltd (since 2008);
- Past Director on the Board of South East Water Ltd (1998 - 2008);
- Served on the Biological Sciences Study Panel of the Australian Research Council (1999 - 2000).

Comment: "My personal philosophy is what I am now trying to talk to my daughter about, who is considering doing a PhD. I tell her don't do it unless you love it and feel passionate about it. I think the best time in my life was when I was in the dark room by myself and I developed the x-ray film and as I was looking at it a spot appeared on it, and that spot told me that I had cloned the gene. That's probably my career highlight."

Marilyn Anderson, 2014

Marilyn Anderson was inducted to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women in 2014.

Dr Sylvia Walton AO & Prof. Marilyn Anderson 2014

Bruce Anderson, Barbara, Helen, Marilyn Anderson, Nick, Alex, Lindsay, 2004

Marin Gunew, Marilyn Anderson, Cathy Alexopoulos, Stefan Czyz, Luba Uwarowa, 2004

Marilyn Anderson with colleagues at 50th school anniversary, 2006

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.

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.

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

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.

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 accountancy, going to work in a bank was seen as 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.

Alex Andrianopoulos (L) and Con Agelinas, 1970s

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 lucky 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 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.

Alex Andrianopoulos and Robert Clarke, St Albans Secondary College, 1996.

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.


Alex Andrianopoulos (L) with Joan Kirner, 1990.

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.

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.


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

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.

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 now 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, March 2016.

Jeff Barlow: Director, Australian College of Contemporary Somatic Psychotherapy

In 1955 when I finished primary school I was told I would be going to St Albans High School. Because our home was just one block away from where the high school was going to be built I kept looking at this vacant block. Come January 1956 there was still no building and I thought they'll have to work hard to get this school built for us in time. Then we got notification that I would be going to Sunshine for my first year of St Albans High.

In that first year at high school, I have memories of doing lots of things with other kids rather than just the organised school activities. There were beautiful grounds and gardens, a lovely oval, and a big grandstand. It was such a beautiful environment for the school. It was a pity the school couldn't actually continue there instead of going to empty paddocks in St Albans.

Going to high school was a real positive experience for me, though there was one thing of which I was not proud. The first day I was at the school I was with a couple of friends when I picked a fight with someone from one of the other schools in the area. Normally I didn't start fights, so clearly there was something going on, and I can only think it was some sort of primitive territorial instinct. This guy really flattened me and after that I didn't start any more fights.

Jeff Barlow and classmates, Form 1D, 1956

Classes were held in a church hall and we had to put up all the partitions and seats every Monday and pull them down again every Friday so the place could be used as a church hall over the weekend.

I can recall we used to walk down to the Sunshine Technical School to do our woodwork classes. It was a huge waste of time. I remember being awful frustrated that we would spend so much time getting there for such a little

amount of time in the classroom doing the work and such a lot of time in getting back again. It was frustrating.

I remember we had a number of excursions to H V McKays or Massey Fergusson as it may have been known by then, which I really enjoyed.

St Albans High School gymnastics 1956

We used to play hand tennis in the school breaks. I was part of a group that was really competitive. As soon as the bell went we'd all be ready to race down, because we only had about two or three courts that we'd chalked out on the asphalt. We'd run out there excitedly and plant our foot on it and that was ours because we had it first off. Whoever was there first off you'd be able to play a game together. Of course, if you lost you were out and the other people could come on. In a fifteen- or twenty-minute morning of afternoon break you couldn't play unless you got there first. I felt that competitive instinct coming out in me during these games.

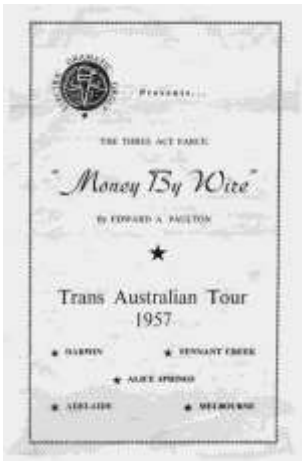
Doc Walsh

Tom "Doc" Walsh was a very influential person to me. He asked me in that first year whether I might be interested in being part of the touring group of the Electra Drama Club that he was hoping to get going and I expressed some interest. He also was very active in getting the football team and the cricket team going. He got the kids active in training, and I used to be part of the team that trained for football. He formed very close friendships with the kids at school in a way that was more personal than other student-teacher friendships. In wintertime when it was really cold we'd practice football and we'd had our showers and cleaned up afterwards he'd take maybe four, five, or six of us to a milk bar and treat us to hot malted milks before we headed back to St Albans. He'd pay for the drinks, so he was very generous in that way. He wasn't married and didn't have children and I felt that this was his way of taking a fatherly role with young people.

Doc Walsh and the cricket team, 1956.

He also set up the sports houses at the school. We ended up with four houses for sports and competitions. He organised the cross country run, which I remember being very excited about because it was the first time I had ever been in a cross country run. Again, I felt very competitive and that competitive instinct kept coming out in me at school in anything to do with athletics.

The Electra Drama Group



Doc came from Williamstown High School and there was a street there called Electra Street that had a little building that was a drama club or a hall that was used as a drama club. He called it the Electra Drama Group. He had kids from the school performing in plays and I think other kids from the area as well, like a little theatre group as far as I can make out, though that was not part of my personal experience. I think he'd taken the group on one or two trips around various parts of Victoria or Australia. When he joined St Albans High School he had the idea to do this again.

We must have started our rehearsals in first form, as I remember in 1957 when I was in second form he hired an old hall in Footscray and we'd go there to rehearsal for the play. We were mainly twelve- or thirteen-year-olds and there may have been a couple of older people from Williamstown who got involved with it as well. The first play was a farce called Money by

Wire. The idea was that we would practice this in 1956 and in the school holidays in '57 and then we would tour this play round Australia, starting through Central Australia to Darwin, and then down the east coast.

Doc got parents involved in fundraising. The idea was that the parents would run a whole lot of social events for their friends and acquaintances. My father got a nine-gallon keg of beer and held events with raffles and hampers to raise money. That money would be pooled and distributed evenly amongst all the kids in the group and whatever the difference was in the cost of the trip and the fundraising we had to put in ourselves through our pocket money or our family's contribution. We also had to buy a uniform. We had slacks and had to buy shoes, shirt, and a jacket with an emblem on the blazer pocket. It was serious. We had hats, either a little beret or a hat with a little Electra badge on it. (I think it was a little torch.)

Touring with the Drama Group

We toured interstate with the Electra Drama Group. The first trip I went on was in 1957 when we headed off to Adelaide. Tom Walsh had written ahead and got people from the various towns whom he knew and they would arrange billets or sometimes we'd stay in hotels. I don't know how he made the contacts, maybe through churches or something like that. They would arrange a hall and arrange the advertising for the play. When we were in Adelaide I stayed with people in Glenelg, a very upper middle class family. I still have a letter from them that they wrote to my mother, saying the enjoyed having me there. It is that polite, courteous letter that people exchanged in those days.

Doc Walsh and the Electra Drama touring party. Jeff Barlow is in the back row, third from the right.

We put on a performance at the Hindmarsh Hall in Adelaide. After that we went to Alice Springs, then to Tenant Creek, then to Darwin , across to Mt Isa and Townsville, then down to Sydney and back to Melbourne. The following year we did another tour, which went the other way. We went up to Cairns that time, and then down the centre again. I was very fortunate to be able to do two trips and two plays. It was a good experience being away with a group of boys your own age and some older as well.

When we were away we also had some money that had been allocated in the trip costs to which we had contributed to pay for different excursions and things. I remember going to Green Island when we were off Cairns or Townsville. It was all very interesting and we were getting to know how people operated under pressure. When I was in Darwin on the first trip I was with a family and one hot day I was running around in the water and cut my leg very badly on the coral. I'd never been in water where there were rocks and coral before, so I was running around just as I had been at the beaches at Altona and Williamstown. I got a nasty cut and had to be taken to hospital for stitches. All those sort of things happened to people.

It was great doing the productions because the boys learnt about performing different roles; they even used to play the parts of the women. We took all our costumes with us and we all did our own makeup. Before we went away Doc had a professional makeup artist come and show us how to put the makeup on properly. We used to grey our own hair and used wigs. I can still remember Jack McMillan, who was a friend of mine, play the role of a woman in one of the plays. Every now and again people would forget their lines so we'd get prompted.

Electra Dramatic Group, 1950s

It was fascinating staying with different families. I got a bit homesick from time to time. You'd be at a loose end sometimes in strange homes where you wouldn't have anything familiar around you, but generally people were very kind, very generous. It added to the trust I had in human beings that people were strongly interested in our wellbeing and wanting to support us to and do what they could to help us have good experiences and safe experiences. They formed very formative experiences on me as a young adolescent. I can remember when we were rehearsing during our first year in the Footscray hall, that kids were starting to smoke. I'd actually had a smoke at home when I was younger but didn't like it; in fact I hated it. Those early experiences turned me off cigarettes for the rest of my life. Although my mother smoked heavily all her life and ended up dying of lung cancer, I was one of the few in the family who didn't smoke. WE had four in the family, the fifth came along many years later when I was an adult. Of the four that grew up together, three smoked.

The tours would take us away for two to three weeks at a time. We had to get additional time off school, so the headmaster, Mr Barker, arranged with the Education Department that we'd get extra time off school. Before we left or after we came back we'd also put the play on for the school. That was good fun because we'd put it on for our parents. I remember taking part in a performance in Footscray at a big hall there. It was a way of helping us feel that we could exercise the various talents that we had in a different forum.

Later, when I was in third or fourth form, we did another very successful school play. Geoff Reed, another teacher, produced that one. Vanda Viti was in it, myself, Switlana Bohudski, and one or two others as the main characters. We won amongst all of the schools in the competition, including the private schools. The adjudicator's comments were written up in the papers.

I think all of us were encouraged to be a bit more outward going. I know I'm inherently a pretty shy person and was pretty much like that through high school. It helped me to come out of that shyness and become a little more extrovert, even though that was on top of an underlying shyness that has continued throughout my life.

Education in Etiquette

The other thing was that Doc used these events as an opportunity to educate kids about the etiquette of social behaviour. That was something that was important for him. He'd bring guest speakers out and we'd gather round one evening and be shown the proper way to use knives and forks and if you had a number of different pieces of cutlery what you would use them for. Then someone else would come and show us how to pack a suitcase so that our clothes weren't just thrown in. He was very keen on that. He took some of us to the Wentworth Hotel in the city, which had silver service. He paid for it all himself. We'd sit at this huge table with starched white linen table cloths and all the silverware and people serving you in their formal black and white livery. I'd never before had that experience in my life. I think he got a kick out of providing that sort of experience. He also got us written up in the local papers and the Sun or Argos.

Jeff Barlow and cast for mock MacBeth drama.

Sex Education

At twelve years, the hormones kicked in. I can remember the first time we found a used condom in the grandstand near the school and that caused an interest, because sex was very taboo in those days. I also remember one boy at school who peed in public because he was busting and didn't want to go down to the toilets. He was expelled from school, and I was shocked by the way he was responded to. So we knew that some body parts and functions were not for public display or discussion. I think it was about second form in high school that we were given some sex education. It was called a 'Father and Son' and a 'Mother and Daughter' night. I think it was organised by one of the Protestant churches and they sold literature there as well. I went with my father and my sister went with my mother. I have no recollection of what they actually taught us there but I remember the book that I obtained was called "He and She" and that

was very helpful, because I could read that book at home whenever I wanted to. We were fairly ignorant of sex, as an interest in sex was seen as shameful; even after the education sessions I was still fairly ignorant about female anatomy.

My lack of awareness of sex was not due to any religious upbringing. My father was raised as a Catholic but for a number of personal reasons was not religious at all, and my mother was not very religious, so we didn't grow up with a religious background apart from what the schools provided through their religious education sessions in primary and secondary school. You could only opt out of these if you had a letter from your parents. I remember one student from a Catholic background telling me he'd confessed to his priest about masturbating and I just couldn't believe how anyone would actually talk to another human being about something so private. The thought of it was quite shocking to me.

But none of us in those days, as far as I am aware, was overtly sexual with the opposite sex. There was some growing awareness but not really talking about it seriously or acting on it, but the feelings were there. I remember my peer group talking bravado talk but it was only talk.

Marching Activities

I remember Harry Lahy, our French teacher. He was either ex-army or ex-air force and was quite autocratic in his approach; he was not a very approachable person. When the school moved to St Albans they instituted home marching, where the different sport houses would line up for marching practice every day. The idea was to bring some discipline to the kids - maybe we were an unruly lot. We had to learn to march like soldiers, boys and girls. We had marching competitions on sports days to decide who were the best marching groups. We'd do left wheels, right wheels, and all sorts of things. Harry Lahy would get very upset if kids would march out of step or wouldn't take it seriously. He shirted-fronted a boy one day for doing something wrong, which really upset me and got my rage up and I had to control myself. That sort of injustice towards students used to rile me up.

Observing Injustice

I can still remember when I was at the primary school there was a kid who was constantly playing truant. One day the headmaster dragged this kid into class. The headmaster had a huge piece of leather and whipped him in front of the class, all over the body and over his legs. The kid was lightly dressed in shorts and short-sleeved shirt and was cowering against the blackboard, while we were sitting there watching this. It was such an act of barbarous cruelty. I cannot believe a headmaster would act like that in front of a group of kids. It traumatised me and built up such a rage in me that I wanted to throttle that guy for what he did. Those really strong rageful feelings stayed with me right throughout high school whenever there was any sort of injustice towards other kids at school. I never ever acted those feelings out in any way, but was certainly aware of them.

One of our maths teachers at high school threw a blackboard duster at one student who'd made some comment. These dusters had a wooden back and it hit the student on the head and split it open so that blood went everywhere. Those sorts of experiences left an indelible impression on me. On the one hand I've got all these people who provided all these nurturing experiences, including Doc and many other teachers, and those few other incidents at primary and secondary school where I saw this cruelty going on and adults acting in way where they were out of control and doing things that shouldn't be happening in those contexts. Nowadays of course I understand they probably were at their wits end and couldn't cope in those circumstances. I think the principal at the primary school was suffering post traumatic stress disorder from his war experiences.

Despite these observations high school was generally a very pleasant experience for me. I felt it was a place I could begin to expand as a person. I was never very bright academically, although I think if I'd had a different sort of encouragement and support ...

Later on I realised that I was actually very intelligent but my results never showed that at school, apart from English, where I did well with a teacher called Jack Clark, I think either in third or fourth form. I later met him again when I was a teacher at Benalla High School and he was the principal. He was very supportive of me in developing a number of programs at the school.

High School and Dress Codes

Whilst we had a fair amount of discipline in the school there was also a fair amount of freedom. I remember when I was in the fourth form - and this probably what led me to be more rebellious when I went to Sunshine High - I had a mock suede brown jacket, which I really liked and used to wear to school, green suede shoes that I'd bought out of the work earnings, and also tight grey trousers. I even went to another school on an exchange trip wearing that gear. The school never picked me out for the way I dressed, or at best one teacher might have said something to me. I've no idea why no-one picked me up. But we did have a school cap, and I did wear my green school cap with my brown suede jacket and my green suede shoes. Later, I worked in Germany for a few years where students don't wear uniforms. When I had German friends come out here and see school uniforms their faces dropped, because the history of Nazi Germany and the German youth movement was all associated with uniforms and

so on. Now the students wear casual clothes and when they see what we are doing here with children's uniforms they think it's Nazi Germany all over.

I finished fifth form in 1960. We didn't have sixth form at St Albans that year so we had to go to Sunshine High; there were between four and six of us who went there. I just didn't fit into the new school. At St Albans we'd always been at the top of the school, so it gave us a sense of entitlement, I think, and we were very fortunate in many ways. At Sunshine there was quite an autocratic principal who was quite a stickler for the rules. He insisted on me purchasing the Sunshine High School uniform, even though I was only going to be there nine months to finish off the last year of school. My parents didn't have much money, and though they were willing to buy the uniform I felt on principle that it was unjust, because I had to go to Sunshine High as the Education Department couldn't provide an education for me at St Albans, yet it was at my expense that I had to buy another uniform so I could fit in with the school. I objected to that on principle.

There was an incident at the school with a Modern History teacher, a young man who was still studying at university. It was February or March in the hot weather and he used to roll up his shirt sleeves. One day he came to class with his sleeves rolled down but he didn't have them buttoned up. When I asked him about this he said the sleeves didn't have any buttons but the principal had told him he was not allowed to have his sleeves rolled up. I again had that feeling of injustice, of dislike for being in an environment where people are ordered around that way and treated as objects just to fit in the rules. It was probably a rebellion from me against some sort of autocratic family upbringing as well.

With regard to the uniform, the principal basically let me continue to attend for a while without the uniform then told me: "You either get the uniform or you can't stay." I told him where to go and left. I spoke with my father and told him I wanted to leave the school. My mother was very distressed, but my father said: "I left school when I was thirteen and you've gone much further than that. You're seventeen, you're old enough to make your own decision." I left school, got a job at Massey Fergusson, and decided to finish my studies at night school.

Work and Evening Classes

I worked at Massey Fergusson, then went to George Kinnear and Sons, the rope works in Ballarat Road Footscray, then Europa Cordage Manufacturers, and then back to Massey Fergusson. Over a two-year period I had three different jobs and finished my sixth year of secondary education at night school. It was pretty hard going. I was going to Footscray Tech as well as George Taylor and Staff in the city. I had studied French to fifth form and tried continuing with French at Taylors, but they had a French teacher who spoke in French all the time and I couldn't understand her so I got disenheartened and dropped the subject. I continued to study Australian History there. At Footscray Tech I studied English Expression, English Literature, and Maths.

I'd travel from St Albans to Sunshine or Footscray to work. College classes would start about 6:30 or 7:00 at night until 9:30 or 10:00 'clock. Then you'd get to the Footscray railway station which was freezing cold at night and you'd catch the train to St Albans and walk from the station to home. You'd get back home very late at night. My mother would have a meal for me that she'd kept steaming to keep it warm. You'd go to bed and often get up at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning to do homework. I don't know what drove me. I think there was some determination, probably anger at the principal I suppose, to show them I could do it myself without relying on them. That sort of rugged and I think strong individualism has been a part of my life ever since. I have taken alternative courses of action to that most other people in the mainstream would probably do.

Studying at Monash

I applied to do economics at Monash University. I did their entrance exam and knew I had done very badly, so I decided I wouldn't go to university. I phoned the bursar - in those days you could phone directly to such people, it wasn't a big procedure - and said I didn't want to go ahead with my application and explained my situation. After discussion with him I enrolled over the phone to do an Arts degree. Over the next four years I completed my Arts degree and Diploma of Education. I had applied for and got an Education Department studentship, which was great, because it paid my fees, paid me a living allowance and a book allowance.

I was living at home to begin with and then met up with Tony Venes. Tony was much older than me but had come to St Albans High during my fourth year and then went on to University High for Matric and Monash to study medicine. There he met John Coleman from Footscray. Tony had a car and was still living in St Albans, so he and I would collect John at Footscray, drive out to Monash Uni, and then come back again at the end of the day. We did this five days a week. It took us nearly two hours to get there

out through St Kilda junction, and the same to get back; it was a terribly long journey.

Then I had an idea. My parents had an old caravan and I asked to borrow that so we could put it in Springvale or Clayton and wouldn't have so far to travel. Frank Banks, who was the manager when I was working at the Keilor Hotel, found us a spot on his brother's equipment depot in Clayton near the university. We had a cold water tap nearby, free electricity, and didn't have to pay for the caravan site, so it was great. We'd be at uni Monday to Friday for lectures, meals and showers, sleep in the caravan, then come home on Friday evenings. We did that for two terms and then I got married.

Marriage

My wife and I were living in a flat at the back of a place in Clayton. Then her mother helped us get a block of land at Knoxfield and an uncle of mine gave us a good price for building a home. We got a bank loan and were paying off the home for the same amount as we'd been paying for a two-room unit at the back of someone's house. That was probably about 1964, and it worked out very well for us.

I finished the four years at uni and went out teaching. By then my wife had left and taken our little girl, which was quite a traumatic experience for me.

Teaching Career

You had to teach for three years for Education Department after finishing the studentship, otherwise you had to pay back the money they had paid you. I thought that was fair. I was very grateful for that opportunity the government provided. Always, for the whole of my life I've been grateful for that opportunity.

My ex-wife had gone up to Mulwala, just over the border from Yarrawonga. I applied to teach at Benalla and Yarrawonga so I could be close to my daughter.

I got a job teaching at Benalla Technical School, stayed there a year and transferred to the high school. I used to visit my daughter regularly and then my ex-wife moved again and I didn't have any contact with my daughter until years later when I was living in London. She contacted me there and my second wife and I brought her out to stay with us.

Working Overseas

I had moved overseas in 1972 and was working on the continent where my wife and I were running a programme on natural childbirth in Vienna. My daughter was with us in Vienna so she had the experience of coming from the heat of Brisbane, through London, and ending up in the snow of Vienna.

When we initially went overseas my wife and I travelled by the trans-Siberian railway. Our idea was that we would travel via Hong Kong and Japan, get the boat over to Vladivostok, travel the trans-Siberian through to Europe, and when we finished out stint in Europe we'd take the overland route back through Turkey, Asia, India, and South East Asia. But when coming back we had two children then and decided we'd fly back instead.

Moving to London had been a complex trajectory. Growing up in St Albans I had so many nationalities represented in the neighbourhood that you couldn't help but become interested in the wider world. In one year I was one of only four native-English-speaking people in the class; everyone else was from all sorts of European countries. That felt normal to me. On my mother's side of the family I had a Greek-Cypriot uncle, a French uncle, a German uncle, and then also a Polish uncle. My mother's maiden name was Latch. Her father was an Australian soldier who was wounded during the First World War. He married a Scots woman when he was recuperating in Dundee, and then brought her home to Australia.

I was always very interested in other counties. My father had been in the navy during the war and travelled extensively around the world and talked about the different countries he'd visited. I'd learnt French at school, so I had an interest in France. We'd also had teachers from France and other countries at the school. When I was in Benalla I met a teacher who had spent a year in London and I became fascinated with the idea of travelling overseas. With this family background of foreign travel in exotic places I became determined when I was in Benalla that I would go overseas, not as a tourist, but to go and live in a country so I could get to know the culture.

After two years at Benalla I went and taught at Mt Waverley High School for a year and then Bentwood High School for a couple of years. When I was there I saw a job advertised for a teacher of English at the teachers college in Port Moresby, New Guinea. I also saw a job for a teacher of English as a second language in Germany with a British-based company. The German job came through first, so that's the one I took. It was a one-year contract at Bernkastel-Kues Rheinlan-Pfalz, which is on the Mosel River between Koblents and Trier. It's a relatively small place of 7,000 people towards the western border of Germany. My wife and I spent the year there. They liked my work, I liked them, and so I signed up for another year. We decided we would stay the second year only if they gave my wife a job because she was a professional in her own right and wanted to

work. She got a half-time job and we stayed another year.

The British-based organisation I was working for was very kind. They had scholarships available for the teachers and gave me a scholarship to Manchester University. I wanted to study adult education, so I my Masters at Manchester University was in Adult Education and Community Development. I chose that because they had strong working class roots and it was known as the bastion of working class tradition, where they would take intelligent working class kids and educate them to a high academic level. I really enjoyed that study and met a couple of really inspiring lecturers there, one in particular being Ralph Ruddock.

Introduction to Psychotherapy

I got very interested in personal development programs, and attended a lot of lectures at Manchester, Edinburgh, and London. After that I decided I wanted to train as a therapist. I happened to find this esoteric college run by a Norwegian woman, Gerda Boyasen, a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist who'd set up this training program in London. I ended up spending six years there, doing basic training and then advanced training. Then I became one of the teachers there and set up my private practice through her organisation. I used to travel to Germany and France and worked there quite a lot. At that stage we were living in London, a place called Shooters Hill, and eventually we bought a little flat there. We were still following natural childbirth, so both our daughter and our son were born at home with the assistance of midwives.

A few years later we decided to come back to Australia because our daughter was four years of age and about to start primary school and we were interested in her having more contact with the extended family. I gave up all the work I had created there, which was very hard for me to do and a very painful break, but I also didn't want to spend the rest of my life in England or continental Europe. After being away for ten years I started to yearn a bit more for Australia.

Return to Australia

We came back at the end of 1981 and spent a year in Melbourne, finding our roots a bit, getting a base, and then decided to settle at Moora Moora Cooperative, which was a cooperative living community out the back of Healesville. The cooperative was set up by a group of people in the early 'seventies. It's still going now, and I think it is the oldest functioning cooperative that is not run by a religious order of some sort.

We lived on the property in an old home and participated in the community, helping people build their mud brick homes, and participating in the development of the land and looking after nature. It was all alternative building. They had made a decision not to connect to the electricity grid, so people produced their own power as well as pumping their own water from springs and collecting it from the roof.

I enjoyed some of the work there, but they had a lot of committees and everything was done on a democratic basis. We set up our own primary school and educated our kids. There were a couple of primary teachers we employed part time, and the parents were teaching at the school as well. But I'm not a committee person and I felt like a fish out of water. Eventually the pressure got too much for me and I felt I couldn't live there any longer. Eventually my wife and I felt the pressure that we were under in our relationship, if we were going to keep that together we needed to move off the land. We moved over the road onto a ten-acre block of land and a house that had been built in the 1920s. Our kids still went to the cooperative's school and we continued our membership of the cooperative. Even today my ex-wife, as she is now, is involved with a book-reading group that is connected with the co-op. Both our kids did their primary education there. Some years after my wife and I separated I lived on the co-op again, renting homes so I could be near the kids. They lived between their mother's home and mine. When I had to move on because the landlords wanted their home back, I decided to buy a house in Healesville. My son was doing fifth year at high school and we moved out together into that home. He's now finished high school and started his degree at Swinburne, then moved to Melbourne. I still live in Healesville but I'm on my own now.

Somatic Psychotherapy

I'm involved in somatic psychotherapy. In Europe and the United States it is called body psychotherapy. In essence it is a form of psychotherapy that is inclusive of the body. This is strongly based in people's emotional realities and the tension states that develop in the body as a consequence of the life trajectories that people will go through and the necessary tension that will develop as people adapt to life's circumstances. The therapy involves not just working with the psychological or cognitive content but also with emotions and tension states and with body expressions as well. My training started in 1975 and I've now been working in this field for thirty years.

I now run a college called the Australian College of Contemporary Somatic Psychotherapy. I've been teaching in this field since the early 'eighties in Australia with various other people. About eight years ago I decided to set up my own college and get together my own team of teachers. We run it from a small home office and lease the facilities that we need. We

have three-year programs in Sydney, Canberra, and Melbourne. We have teachers from all those locations and some teachers, including myself, that travel between locations. The training programs run for three years and the students are all involved in 200 training hours each year. There is a lot of experiential learning as well as academic learning. The students have to be involved in their individual psychotherapy outside of the training program with someone not connected with the college. When they finish their training they get an academic credential, i.e. an academic diploma. Those who want to become psychotherapists then do two years of post-training supervision and at the end of that when they're accepted into the professional association, which is separate from the college, they get a clinical credential, i.e. a clinical diploma.

I also run a part-time private practice, working with individual clients, and do some supervision of experienced and inexperienced therapists, not just in the field of somatic psychotherapy but also with other therapists who are interested in the sort of direction that I work in. I am very busy. I've got some good staff who are backing me, which is terrific. It's like any job where you are working with people and you are transforming people - it can be fraught with a lot of emotional difficulties from time to time. But that is the sort of work I'm involved in and that is par for the course.

I became interested in setting up a college because I could be my own boss and bring in the teachers that I wanted to, to move the training in the direction that I thought was necessary. I've had enough experience in other committees running training programs where I always had to pander to the conservative bent of certain people. I'm pretty radical in the way I think about life and in particular about the training of psychotherapists. I wanted to pursue that trajectory without having to be fighting for what I wanted to do. I was too old to be fighting, I just wanted to do it. I thought I've got about ten to fifteen years of effective professional life left. If I don't do it now I'll never do it. That's what I did. I work very long hours, I don't get very much money, and whatever money I do get goes back into the business to pay other people. The thing is, I'm passionate about it.

Other Interests

I'm a great reader. I have a vast library and do a lot of reading. A lot of it you would call professional reading or work reading, but I'm one of those people who finds it difficult to separate work and pleasure, work and leisure, because they are connected for me. A lot of the reading I do is stimulating, not only for me personally because I'm intellectually interested, but it advances my knowledge about people and it's also connected with the work I'm doing. It's got both sides to it.

I've enjoyed overseas travels. Since coming back from Europe in 1982 I've had three trips to Europe, one to the United States, travelled to Japan a couple of times, South East Asia, the Philippines, and New Zealand. When we were overseas my wife and I took time off from work and spent four months in Spain, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia with a cousin of mine and his wife, travelling with a campervan and tent. Then we spent three months backpacking around South America as well, using public transport and staying in very cheap places, some of which charged US$1 per night per person. While we were in Europe we travelled extensively. We drove through Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Hungary, then travelled extensively around Germany, France Holland, Belgium, up into Scandinavia to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Because I had a Greek-Cypriot uncle we also did a trip down to Cypress and caught up with some of my uncle's family, which was nice. I enjoyed that.

Recently I went to India. I got very interested in Indian history and got a book about Ghandi and the struggle for the independence of India from Britain, which is what I'm reading about at present though it is nothing connected with my work.

Nowadays I think my hobby is my work and my work is my hobby; it's all rolled into one. The things I do enjoy are having quiet times with people I'm close to. My ex-wife and I are still good friends and I enjoy the times when we get together for conversation. I very much enjoy the time with my son and my daughter; my daughter is living overseas at present and I don't see much of her. I see my son on a fairly regular basis and enjoy our time together. I enjoy meeting with colleagues and having social time with them, chatting and having a drink.

In the last five years or so I've been very keen to reconnect with St Albans and the high school. I managed to catch up with Andy Kratsis a couple of years ago and through that have been able to make more and more connections with people. I felt there was a significant gap in my life because of that lack of connection.

Working Class Roots

Not too many people in Australia talk about the class system, but there definitely is a class system in Australia and I come from a lower working class background; my father was unskilled in the work he did. We didn't have very much money when I was growing up. My mother provided me with a very strong motivation to get whatever education I could, to go as far as I could in life. I'm very grateful to her for that. My father was happy for me to go as far as I was comfortable; he would have been happy if I'd left school at fifth form, because it didn't really

matter to him. It was my mother who did the crying because I wasn't going any further. She was very keen that I move on in life and I felt that as well. I felt I had potential that I wanted to live out and that was facilitated by the support I got from my mother in particular, support I got from significant teachers at school who encouraged me to think about education as a career, Geoff Reed in particular. He was the first one who suggested university, and my response was "What is university?" I didn't even know what a university was at the time. He was the one who also told me about the Education Department studentships.

Jeff & Glenda Barlow with parents, High School 1960.

Through education I moved up into middle class life and then, apart from my family, broke all my working class roots with St Albans and have felt there was this split in me. I have read sociological studies about kids who move from working class to middle class experiencing emotional difficulties in that transition. I certainly experienced that and have always wanted to reconnect with my educational and social roots, not so much with the adults of my time but with the peer group that I was involved with. So I'm very excited at the moment with all the reconnecting I'm doing with the people I know. When I speak with them on the phone or meet with them I feel I'm in a time warp, because I've got memories of them back there and we think we knew each other but we didn't, we only mucked around together at school and we had no idea of what was going on in each other's family lives or where people came from. Maybe we knew the country they came from but nothing about their histories, what the families had been through in Europe during the war. I feel a real hunger to get to know about people's background and what they went through. A number of people I've met have been very open in sharing their stories, which has been a rich experience for me, and I'm both excited and grateful to have experienced that.

In my family there was this thing that you had to work for a living. I started selling newspapers when I was eight or nine down at the railway station. Then I was delivering newspapers in the morning for Doug Martello's milk bar; he had a newspaper section as well. I worked at Self Brothers and Goddard, chopping up big blocks of butter into little manageable packets and wrapping then up, pouring sugar out of the big hessian bags into little paper bags, and weighing up potatoes. I used to work every Saturday morning at Stevens Hardware Store, from 8 o'clock to 12:30 or 1:00. When I was about fifteen I would go down to Footscray and deliver telegrams of a Saturday afternoon. I'd ride my bike all over Footscray delivering telegrams. I did that for quite a number of years.

My father was a milkman, but he was also the cleaner at the primary school in St Albans. From the age of about twelve every night after school until about fourth of fifth form I used to work with him. We'd start about 4:30 and finish anywhere between 6:30 and 8:30 at night, depending on the weather.

When I was about fifteen I was trying to earn some money over the school holidays. My father, who had previously worked at Smorgons, knew somebody there who used to select the guys to work. They had this very primitive employment system where the unemployed guys would turn up at the gate to the abattoir and the guy in charge of employment would say "you, you, and you" as he pointed to the men he wanted. Those guys would be in and get work and the others would have to go away. I had to turn up with the others but the employment guy recognised me and picked me. I had that job during the school holidays, firstly packing fillets of beef in big plastic bags and cartons for the export market, then trimming the fat off middle loin chops, standing for 8 to 10 hours a day just trimming bits of fat off lamb chops. It made me determined I wasn't going to do that job for the rest of my life. The stench from the abattoirs was terrible. I had a fair bit of exposure to such working conditions, because an uncle of mine, Dick Spicer, had a business with a five-ton truck where he'd go around the abattoirs collecting sheep and cattle skins. I worked with him a few times as well. It was very dirty and bloody work, where you'd get covered from head to foot with splashes of blood and bloody water as you threw these skins around. It was really dirty stuff.

Out at St Albans I also worked carting hay over various summers. I worked for a contractor who used to take us out to Sydenham, Sunbury, and Riddell. I was about fourteen when I was doing that. I didn't have the strength of the men, so the men would throw the hay up on the back of the truck and I would steer the truck around the paddocks in between where the bails were. I used to get bored and every now and then I'd put my foot down on the throttle and those guys would be falling off the back of the truck and would be screaming abuse at me. One day when a guy nearly hurt himself I realised that I

had to be careful. I was doing it as a bit of a joke but what I was doing was quite dangerous.

Before I went to university I needed to get some money rapidly over the summer and the guy I knew at Kinnears said he'd get me a job in the hemp mill. The carding machine in a hemp mill processes these huge rolls of hemp that were brought in from India. The work is very dusty as the machines clawed their way through the vegetable matter and there were clouds of dust in the air. All the other men in that section were migrants most of whom could not speak English. I assimilated myself to them. We started work at 6 o'clock in the evening and finished 6 o'clock in the morning. When we had our breaks I'd go in with my black bread and my knife, my hunk of cheese and hunk of salami, and bit of tomato, so I could sit down with these European guys - there were no women in our section - and in broken English we'd try to converse and eat our rye bread and whatever. After Kinnears and Sons I went to Massey Fergusson.

When I was about seventeen I got a job at the Keilor Hotel. Frank Banks was the guy who ran that with his wife. I did that work for many years. Even when I was full-time at the university I was still working at the pub on Saturday afternoon. Later I got a job working Saturday mornings at Kempthorne Lighting in Clayton. I'd work there in the morning and go to the pub in Keilor in the afternoon.

During the uni holidays I worked in the maintenance department of Kempthorne Lighting. I also worked as a waiter serving wine at private functions, did tutoring of English, and whatever I could to earn a dollar. My father taught me that. At one time he had three jobs on the go: he was doing the school cleaning in the evening, then he'd be up at 1:30 in the morning heading off to deliver the milk, and during the day he was delivering groceries for Self Brothers and Goddard.

Jeff Barlow, 2005

The Blahut Family: Business Proprietors

The Blahut family came from an Austrian refugee camp to Australia in 1950 under the Displaced Persons Scheme, and then settled in St Albans in 1953.

Elizabeth Blahut was one of the early World War Two refugees who settled quickly into Australian society and established a sound business reputation, firstly in conjunction with her Australian mentor, Mr Robert Potts, and then in her own right as a small business proprietor. She opened a haberdashery store in 1957. Three of her children (John, Toni, and Peter) went to St Albans High School from the late 'fifties and during the 'sixties, and a granddaughter also attended in the 'seventies.

Alzbeta "Elsa" Ragan was born in 1914 in the former Czechoslovakia in a place called Ipelske Sahy, the name denoting that the village Sahy was located on the river Ipel, which is the border between Slovakia and Hungary. She was one of fourteen children in the family, seven boys and seven girls. As Elsa was growing up she quickly acquired the native Czech and Slovak vernaculars, and also Hungarian. The latter language was also a natural childhood acquisition as the village was right on the Hungarian border and actually closer to Budapest (the capital of Hungary) than it was to Bratislava (the capital of Slovakia). Even as a young woman Elsa was a go-getter, and she was the first of the children in the family to get a paying job at a time when it was unusual in Slovakia for women to seek paid employment outside the family home. In 1938 Elsa married Anton Blahut (who was born in 1907) and they settled further north into central Slovakia along the river Vah, at the town of Povarska Bystrica.

The Ragan Family; Elsa is front row center, 1927

The German army occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939 and imposed a harsh regime. Despite being caught up in the war, the Blahuts raised two children. Olga, their first daughter, was born in May 1942. Eighteen months later in November 1943 their second daughter, Antonia (Toni), was born. But towards the end of the war, when Soviet forces entered Czechoslovakia in 1944, many people feared the rise of the communists and felt the threat to religious and personal freedom. The family couldn't flee north to Poland, the closest border, because that was already occupied by the Russians, so they headed southwards for the sanctuary of Austria, where they eventually arrived at a migrant camp in the American-controlled zone.

Life as Refugees

Conditions in the refugee camp were primitive. A dozen families shared one hut, food was scarce, and relief parcels from the refugee agency were even rarer. The other refugees were from different European countries, also desperate to escape their circumstances. Each day the men would go into town to look for work while the women sold what few possessions they could or turned their hand to knitting and selling garments in order make some money. Their lives of hunger, illness, and poverty continued for the next five years. During this time the Blahut's first son Marian "John" was born in December 1946 in the camp.

German was the main language in Austria, but in the refugee camps it was a polyglot environment that introduced Elsa to the rudiments of her neighbours' languages, particularly the Slavic tongues: Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and also Yugoslavian (as it was then known). Elsa found she was adept at picking up languages and this became a skill she retained to her advantage in her later work.

In 1948 the refugees heard that the communists in Czechoslovakia had organised a coup detat and taken control of government, and under their influence the country then followed the policies of the USSR. This was the last blow for many of the displaced nationals still in the holding camps of the neighbouring countries; they definitely could not return

People were desperate for escape to virtually any country, but the receiving countries each had their own quotas and priorities. So the families languished in the camps until they were lucky enough to be accepted somewhere. Sometimes people feared that they would never be accepted at all, despite the efforts of the International Refugee Organisation. When the IRO immigration officials advised that migrants were being recruited for Australia, it was an opportunity that many of these refugees accepted as their escape. Elsa and Anton were happy to get away with their children.

Migrating to Australia

So in 1950 the Blahuts left Austria for an even greater unknown: the antipodes. There were 5,000 Czechoslovak nationals who arrived that year in Australia, which was the peak year of these post-war arrivals. Mostly they settled in New South Wales, with Victoria having the next highest number. By 1951 and 1952 the intake was declining, with 1,100 and 500 arrivals respectively. Between 1955 and 1957 there was on average fewer than 200 Czechoslovak nationals per year still arriving in the country, and in fact by this stage there were more departures so there was a small annual decline in these population figures.

[Anton Blahut with John, Toni, & Olga at Somers Migrant Camp.]

As happened with many other arrivals, the Blahut family was first taken to the migrant hostel in Bonegilla. Here there was food enough, but the families were separated as men were billeted separately from their wives and children. Though this condition prevailed on the ships bringing them over, it was an unexpected intrusion into family arrangements once they had come ashore, particularly at a time when family cohesion was about the only security that people had to draw on. But even this was survivable.

Though it was a strange country to them the Blahuts soon began to realise that most people were genuine in their welcome of new settlers and recognised that Australia was slowly becoming more cosmopolitan. Australia's population was just 8.3 million people, but it was growing quickly because of the many immigrants arriving from Britain and Europe. The government-sponsored migration program provided food, shelter, and employment. Under the migration obligations, Anton had to work for two years as directed by local officials. But it was paid work. The basic wage for men in Victoria was £6/14/-. It was lower for women, slightly

more than half the male rate. This was considered adequate for women, because it was assumed they didn't have anyone else to support. Australians at that time were seeing the benefits of a large immigration program that contributed to a healthy growth in the local economy and boosted both imports and exports, and the federal government believed the nation was poised on the brink of even greater prosperity.

The Blahut family at Somers Migrant Camp.

Anton Blahut

In Slovakia Anton Blahut worked in an office. In Australia his allocated employment was first as a fruit picker and then with the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW), with whom he worked for many years. He finally ended up working for the tramways.

The family moved between the migrant camps at Bonegilla, Rushworth, and Somers, as Anton carried out his work obligations with the MMBW. Moving from the New South Wales border across to central Victoria and then down to the shores of Western Port Bay was like travelling from one end of Czechoslovakia to the other. The Somers migrant hostel had previously been used by the scouting movement as a holiday camp and later as an RAAF training camp, then became a migrant hostel from 1949 until 1958. Families lived in corrugated iron quarters similar to the army Nissan huts. The children went to school in nearby Hastings where the Sisters of St Joseph were running the classes. The children would usually be transported there by army trucks. The area has pleasant sheltered beaches and a variety of exotic bird life attracted to the lagoons, so it was a tranquil setting for the family in establishing a new life, though some arrangements were still unsatisfactory - Anton was working in Werribee during the week and his family was in Somers, so he saw them only once month on weekends. Despite this a sense of security was being achieved, so they were delighted when their second son, Peter, was born; a true Aussie boy.

Elsa was learning English very quickly and obtained a job almost immediately with the general store in Somers. Mr Robert Stanley Potts was the owner of the business and he quickly saw that having a multilingual assistant was a great asset to the business. The growing number of "foreign" customers from the migrant camp kept returning to the town store where they could be understood and where they could purchase the daily necessities in the comfort of their own language.

Moving to St Albans

By 1953 the family had saved enough money for a deposit on a small land and house package. By now they had four children so they were looking for something of their own to raise the family. St Albans was the place that many people were turning to because the land was cheap and readily available, and so the decision was made. They left the Somers migrant camp and moved into a small home in Glendenning Street, St Albans. The neighbours were Polish and Hungarian families. At this time the area was still mostly open paddocks and there were very few houses.

A lot of people from the Somers camp came to settle here, including nearly all of the Polish people who had been at Somers. It happened because representatives from Bells Real Estate came to the hostel advertising the availability of cheap land in St Albans, which of course was an attractive enticement for people who had little money. Anthony was able to continue his employment with the Board of Works, so at least one breadwinner was assured of continuing employment.

St Albans was different to Somers, particularly with its flat open spaces and small farms. Glendenning Street was not very far from the railway station and the small shopping centre. Perrett ran the general store and post office agency, and to get the child endowment you had to wait in line at Perrett's because it was the post office that distributed the child endowment money. Not far from Perrett's store, on the corner of West Esplanade was a old barber. Olga, who was already 10, soon found herself a little job in cleaning the barber's shop on Saturdays to earn some pocket money.

It was pleasant to see the trees that had been planted around the area and along the main road, which added to the rural charm of the area. It was only later that many of these trees were chopped down.

Elsa Blahut & children (L-R): Olga, John, Peter, Toni

St Albans at this stage was still a small town with a population of 900 people, but it was on the brink of its most spectacular period of growth. Until 1928 the population base had been fairly static with fewer than 200 residents. For the next 25 years to 1953 there was a slow increase as the town numbers crept from 200 to 900. Then suddenly there was the population explosion as the town tripled in size within a couple of years. Within two years the numbers skyrocketed to 4,000 people, an increase that was ten times the national average if not more. The post-war European migration had arrived with a force that would change the quiet little farming village forever.

At the national level in 1953 Australia had reached 8.9 million in population. Migration had brought in 163,000 people for the year, one of the highest intakes. The target for new arrivals was 115,000 for 1954-55, and 125,000 in 1955-56, so as to maintain a 1% growth in the total population. The migration program was set to continue as a positive force in the growth of Australian society, and therefore St Albans would continue to expand at an incredible pace. And, of course, this meant that businesses had the opportunity to prosper.

The Potts Store

Mr Potts also decided to move his little country business, and the opportunities in St Albans sounded to be a worthwhile risk. In 1953 he set up his store in Main Road East, "R S Potts Pty Ltd", which was next to the "Coles corner", as the intersection of Alfrieda Street and Main Road East was later known. He quickly became part of the growing business community and was soon characterised as the fellow with the big truck who sold all kinds of articles including food and clothing. Later it seems that his business became mainly a drapery store and the bank agency. Robert Potts was noted for extending credit to customers; if you didn't have the money to pay in full he would give you the merchandise you needed and allow you to pay the balance over time. He was also community spirited. In 1956 when the youth club was being completed he donated an amplifying system for the building.

Mr Potts took on an arrangement with the State Savings Bank to act as their agent at St Albans, and the positive working relationship with Elsa Blahuts continued in this new environment. The rapidly expanding migrant population here also responded quickly to the diplomatic charm and multilingual skills of Mr Potts' assistant, so the store and the banking agency enterprise grew. Elsa's efficiency was such that even though she was Mr Potts' assistant in the business she was virtually doing all the paperwork. People remember her from this time as an attractive woman who looked a lot like Marlene Dietrich, in some people's view.

Going into Business

However, after a few years Mr Potts passed away in 1957 at the age of 60, and his shop was later taken over by May Knowles. At that stage Elsa had to make some quick decisions and one of those was to make a bid for the banking agency. So in September 1957 she wrote to the State Bank of Victoria with the proposition that she continue operating the agency as she had effectively been doing for the last couple of years. Elsa had effectively taken over the full management of the bank agency from September 1957. At this stage she took advantage of another of her skills that had contributed to the family's survival in the refugee camp. She went back to the business of knitting, by opening a wool store, Elsa's Drapery, at 294 Main Road East, which was just further along the street between Collins and Erica streets. Knitting, crocheting, and sewing were traditional handcraft skills for all women in that era. It was done as a challenging yet relaxing pastime and also because of necessity. During the war many Australian women contributed to the war effort by knitting socks, jumpers, etc.

At this stage Elsa also had an assistant in the business, a Mr Ludgate, who could also handle the banking transactions, but it was Elsa who was in charge. On 2 October 1957, much to Elsa and her family's joy, she received confirmation that she was appointed as the Agent of the State Savings Bank at St Albans. So Elsa had plenty of customers now in her own small business.

And then in the 'sixties when Toni Blahut left high school she also got a job with the State Savings Bank and was working at their Sunshine office.

Later, when the population of St Albans had expanded even further, the management of the State Savings Bank decided to open a branch office in the main shopping area and they asked Elsa to take a position at the bank. She accepted, and was thus able to continue her contact with many St Albans residents in helping them with their finances. She was pleased to have her personal story included in one of the

State Bank's publications, particularly as it demonstrated that migrant women were able to succeed in positions requiring business acumen and management responsibility rather than just be relegated to the factory floor.

Family Tragedies

The children were growing towards their adulthood and life seemed pretty good for the Blahut family. John started high school in 1959. Unfortunately the biggest family tragedies occurred in 1963, when both Anton and Toni died within six months of each other. Anton succumbed to cancer, while Toni died suddenly and unexpectedly as a result of a parachuting accident at Pakenham.

Retirement

When Elsa finally retired she still enjoyed the company of the many good friends she had made in St Albans. When asked to be the guest speaker at one of the Tin Shed's discussion group sessions, she spoke frankly about the hardships of her war experiences and the challenges she was able to overcome in her new homeland. She had no regrets.

Elsa Blahut nee Ragan passed away in 2002 at the age of 88 years.

Peter Blahut

Mum would tell me about her early life in Slovakia and how she went to the Bata factory to buy some shoes and the salesman asked if she could speak Hungarian. She could, so he offered her a job and she accepted. It was very unusual for young girls to work in those days, and mum was the only one of the seven girls who had a paying job, so she was treated like a princess at home. She said when she came home they'd mend her stockings and all.

Every week they used to do stock taking which went fairly late so her brother would come and pick her up. She'd finish about 11 o'clock at night and they'd walk home which took about half an hour.

When you started working in a shop there it was a three-year apprenticeship. Because she worked in a shoe shop she also had to learn to do pedicures and all that sort of stuff; it was everything. They got small wages and worked on commission. All the people liked her so she made big money.

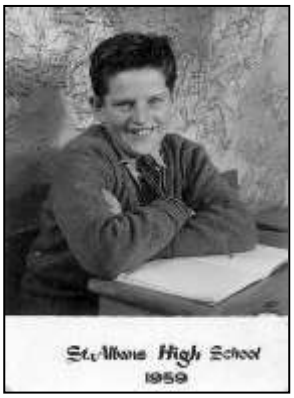
Mum's father was a station master. When he got the position at Ipelske Sachy they were going to put the family into units, but he didn't think that was suitable for the kids so they offered him a railway house with a couple of acres. They grew their own vegetables and had a couple of cows and pigs.

I think my mum was way ahead of her time. Even when she was older she was more with it than I was when I was young. She always looked after herself and was well groomed. She went to the hairdresser once a week even up to the week she died.

When I went to the shop after school or on Saturdays mum would often be speaking to several customers in several languages at the same time - German, Yugoslav, Polish - and keep the three different conversations going. That used to amaze me because I found it difficult in one language. She was good with languages.

I went to Sacred Heart School for primary school in 1955 and later went to St Albans High School.

I remember Mr Smith and Mr McLeish. Mr Torpey was the headmaster and the vice principal was Mr Matthews. Mrs Sturesteps must have been there a long time because she was later teaching Olga's daughter when she went to the school in the 'seventies. Mr Smith came from Ballarat and taught in St Albans. When we went to live in Ballarat he'd returned to the area and taught my daughter and my two nieces. He'd mellowed down a bit by then.



My brother John was at St Albans High from 1959 to 1964. He left after form 5 and worked as a sales representative for a number of years before he took up driving a delivery truck for Comet. John also ended up living in Ballarat and had two daughters.

I transferred to the technical school for form 4 because I wanted to do an electrical apprenticeship. I always felt a bit nervous at school but I managed to get a B Grade Electricians certificate.

I went to Slovakia with mum in 1992 and again in 1994, and I'm hoping to go there this year with my sister. Mum was the only one of her family who left Slovakia, and we've still got one aunt and one uncle over there from mother's side. On father's side they've all passed away.

He had a sister and brother but they went to America in the 1930s. The aunt still in Slovakia was the youngest in the family and now she's 82. She's a fantastic character.

At first I was hesitant in going to visit because I thought I wouldn't know them from a bar of soap. I was also unsure because I didn't know the language too well - my parents tried to teach me but I said I was an Aussie. It was amazing how quickly there was a connection. They met me at the airport and within five minutes it felt as if I'd known them all my life. It was an amazing feeling because there an immediate family bond.

Under the communists they were too scared to write and only one sister would write to mum. She never wrote anything political.

At present I'm working as a driver for TNT and have been doing that for nearly 30 years. I have a set area around Richmond with regular customers.

John is now retired and living in Lakes Entrance and only works part-time on weekends.

Olga Blahut

I remember when we were in Somers that a lot of the migrant women earned some money by picking vegetables on the nearby farms. I wanted to buy my mother a present or just to help financially so I joined the women in picking peas and beans. It seemed to me that I had had been picking all day and didn't even get a shilling for my effort. All the women who were there felt sorry for me and they all contributed some of their own earnings so that I got more. That was my one and only attempt at produce picking. I was only 10 and it was hard work. I was so excited by the thought of earning all this money so I could do something for mum. Mum worked virtually straight away at Somers.

When we came to St Albans I went to St Aloysius in North Melbourne for my secondary schooling. It was run by the Sisters of Mercy. I went there till I was 14 and then stopped. Mr brothers and sister all went to St Albans High School. My daughter Elizabeth was born in 1963 and went to the high school in the mid 'seventies and then to Geelong uni. All my boys went to St Johns in Braybrook. By the time my youngest girl was of high school age we were living in Ballarat.

I hated school and left as soon as I could and worked with mum in her shop. I found it interesting working in the shop, where you'd be speaking every other language but English. Mostly the customers were Europeans, but by that time there were more Europeans than Australians living in St Albans.

I really liked being there and even when I had my children I would go every day to the shop to assist mum. My kids thought it was the best time they ever had as children. Mum had a fairly big shop and there were lots of things that caught the eye of toddlers. She had lots of different coloured buttons and wool and they'd be into the counters exploring things. For them it was a wonderland. My first son Paul was a contented child; I'd put him into an empty card board box and he would stay there looking around him. When people saw Paul as he was much older they would recognise him and ask "Are you the boy in the box?" He is in Queensland now. My daughter would tip the box over and crawl out to explore. I had five children: Elizabeth, Paul, Michael, Andrew, and Cathy.

Mum didn't have a lay-by system but she would let people take the goods home and pay them off as they could, and most of them were wonderful and paid everything off.

I went to Slovakia three years ago. Some of our family are extremely rich but the wife will open the pantry and have it full of home preserves she'd made herself. It's like they did here 50 years ago. Even city people buy the vegies in the summer and bottle it. Bottling is still a tradition over there but nobody does it here anymore.

My most memorable occasion in Slovakia was when we went to where mum and dad lived with my dad's parents. The home was no longer standing but part of an original shed was still there. That was extremely touching to be there. The people now living there invited us in for lunch and were very hospitable. You're barely in the door and they have the whole table laden with food. We visited the cemetery where our grandparents are buried. We also saw the home where mum lived.

I'm now living back in St Albans and many of the long term residents still remember me and my mother. They still speak nicely of her. It makes me proud that she was well known, because she was a very hard-working woman. She was a fantastic businesswoman.

Olga and Peter Blahut, 2005.

Les Cameron: Footballer, Radical Educator

I was born on 18 June 1946 in Newcastle, New South Wales, and christened Leslie Munroe Cameron. My father, Jack Cameron, was from Sydney, and my mother, Lorna Yates, was from Preston, Victoria. In 1949 the young family stayed for a while with my grandparents in Preston and then built a bungalow in the developing suburb of St Albans. People who remember St Albans in the 'fifties and 'sixties will remember Jack and Lorna Cameron for their involvement with a variety of community activities, particularly the St Albans Community Youth Club. I think the growth of the youth club was tremendously important to the town as it nurtured a variety of other groups, including the junior football competition.

St Albans was definitely a growing place. When I started primary school there were about 900 people in the neighbourhood, and by the time I finished primary school there were over 4,000 and the small town was expanding rapidly.

There was definitely a different environment then as refugees and displaced persons from various European countries started building their homes in the district. I have memories of the espresso bar in the arcade and the young men hanging out there and sometimes it was wise to avoid it by crossing the street. Some of them were angry people, probably someone who was fourteen during the war, so they hadn't fought but had seen their fathers die and still had lots of anger. Males were expected to be able to defend themselves and I remember lots of fist fights in the school ground and outside in which I participated as did others. We're talking about people from a post-war scenario but including kids who had experienced war. Certainly the 'fifties and early 'sixties were more authoritarian and it was a more violent culture - physical punishment was an accepted part of disciplining students. There was also more distance between teachers and students, which had some strength, perhaps.

Starting High School

I started at St Albans High in 1958. The school was established in Sunshine in 1956 and I remember visiting it with my mother in the church hall near the sports ground.

When I commenced with the school in St Albans in 1958 and there must have been about 250 kids starting that year spread over about 8 classes. As many as 230 of those kids would have been from migrant families, so the vast majority of students were from a non-English-speaking background. I think there might have been only three other Australian kids in my class that year: Rosemary Carson, Ian Sharp and Peter Plain.

Les Cameron at school assembly 1958

Teachers

The range of teachers' capacity was extensive, from those who were dedicated and inspirational to those who weren't. Some teachers were formally qualified while others had university subjects as their academic background. Obviously the boom in numbers left the decimated previous generation in poor shape to fill staffrooms across the country. That teaching culture emphasised the contrasts in what was possible within the education system.

Of the teachers, I remember Barry Rayner who seemed to epitomise what most of the boys thought was their ambition of becoming: good looking, relaxed, charming, articulate and mathematical … a heady combination. George Strauss, teacher of German and English, was worldly and esoteric. Geoff Reid, who later became the president of the VSTA, was a wonderful teacher and inspired us in French and English with his passion, eccentric singing, and commitment. He was a very straight-backed man and whatever he did was direct and with compassion.

V Troszczyi, P Tucker, Mr Rayner, P Becker,
M Trumanis, Mr Paterson, L Cameron.

Doc Walsh would obviously be remembered by many and I remember him at two levels: his passion for sporting excellence and, above all, his fairness. He used to umpire just about every football match at the school and on one leg of his very baggy shorts he wore the red and green colours of Waratah and Kurrajong and on the other would be the yellow and purple

of Wattle and Jacaranda That was very strong symbolism and resonated with the time as we forged a primitive multiculturalism on the sporting field. “Doc” always seemed to have some Vaseline cream on hand, which solved every problem on the sports oval. If you were bleeding you got some Vaseline on the cut, if you got a rash there was Vaseline, and if you had a headache then some Vaseline across the forehead was the remedy.

Doc introduced American history into the school which was a simple but significant break from traditionalism. We were a long way from a truthful, generic, history of the world but Doc introduced tentative steps away from Anglo-centric curriculum and emphasised the revolutionary nature of American development. I am sure he stimulated an interest in equity across the classes and races and did it in an exciting, theatrical manner. It was a period of great interest about America and where it stood in the world. People who remember the Second World War well would have seen the Americans as the saviours of Australia and its Anglo life-style. Perhaps while we ignored our aboriginal history and the migrant stories that were all around Doc had us at least recognising that the world was bigger than what you could see.

The other person I remember well is Jack Everson. He was the maths teacher and an excellent one, absolutely stunning, as was George Sinclair in physics. Jack was one of those people who not only schooled you but excited you in terms of the passion he brought to the subject. Probably the saddest story I remember about Jack was in relation to school inspectors. In those days a teacher’s performance in the classroom was inspected by the Education Department but we all thought it was the kids who were being inspected. Jack, like probably most other teachers, was dependent on his next promotion through whether or not he could run a very effective class in front of a forbidding inspector sitting at the back of a class of about 40 kids.

On the day I remember Jack ran a repeat of the class he’d taught us previously, which was not unusual at inspection time. I was pretty good at mathematics but was bored silly while this was going on and, not realising the importance of this session for him, I went “off air”. During the lesson he asked me a question, possibly hoping for a bright answer, but I wasn’t paying attention. Prompted by one of my buddies I gave the suggested answer, which was wrong. I had been deliberately set up by my erstwhile mate, Per Becker. I was accused by Jack of attempting to subvert his future in teaching. It was a salutary lesson, because I did like and respect Jack so much, but I became more aware that there were games going on above your head that you didn’t understand. I was in year 9 or 10 at the time and it brought me to an adult world.

George Sinclair was another of absolute significance to the school as well as to many of us. He was the person who effectively encouraged me to take up science and eventually do a physics major. A brilliant style of a man: thoughtful, considerate, excited by ideas.

Alison Gliddon, the English teacher, was infectiously passionate about her craft and excited us by what we learnt, thought, and did.

All of those people were considerate to us as human beings but more particularly they were interested in something that mattered. Later when I became a teacher I tried to both demonstrate my passions as reasonable examples of what the world considers but also to find that spark in each student: what is your family history, what matters to you, and then how can I fan that spark and make it your passion, your purpose and your refuge.

Mary Myers was the first psychologist at the school and St Albans was probably seen as being in need of psychology, though I don’t think that Mary would have felt that was the case. She was employed as student counsellor. She must have been there fairly early because I had most to do with her immediately after Dad died (1962). She also gave me a great push along academically. She recognised very early that many of the kids were being asked to compete with other kids from professional homes in other suburbs and yet there was no study capacity at home because there was no room or family history of Anglo-Australian schooling expectations. So Mary arranged that the school provided for private study, where you could come back at 4 o’clock and study there, with supports from volunteer teachers (mainly Mary!!). This had a very high impact on my later academic results and I suspect a lot of students could trace success back to Mary.

Fellow Students

When I look back at that period I realise how badly we treated the migrant members of our school. Partly that was curriculum driven, as almost everything we were learning was related to an English perspective. So, while we heard of Shakespeare we wouldn’t have heard of Proust, or we would have studied the kings and queens of England but not taken a look at was happening in Europe let alone Asia. There was a narrow sense of that look at the world outside Australia. When I think of people like Hannelore Henschke, Sneja Gunew, Rosemary Kiss, or Rosemary Keegan who was an English migrant, I feel that we’d not taken the opportunities that could have been there to explore real examples of a wider world.

Probably like most Aussie boys of the time I was intimidated by the strange world that girls occupied anyway, and therefore conversations that might have happened didn’t happen. I was

in awe of Sneja because she seemed capable of doing anything, as she later proved. She did the science course with us in Year 11 and topped the class by a wide margin. She decided at the end of the year she wasn't continuing with science and then topped the humanities course by a wide margin. I learnt later that for many of our migrants who had come from professional backgrounds that some of this can be explained by cultural capital, and that notion is very important to me in analysing achievement.

In many ways my experiences of fellow students is a blur. Looking back I see how little time we spent together outside the classroom. So we had impressions rather than friendships. Family, home duties, community, and sports took my time. It was not till my twenties that I felt I began to really talk to people. Nevertheless faces that flash across my mind, like the above mentioned or Lorenz and Katie Schwab, Darya Hawdio, Loretta Rennie, Rosemary Carson, Richard Wiatr, Thrasos Caravatis or Victor Troszczyi all had an impact. When I look back I realise how family centric I was and how I didn't even know the kids who were in my immediate group either. I didn't really know Ian Sharp's story until I met him again 5 years ago. I knew his family and visited the house but to actually understand the culture of a home is almost as difficult as to understand the culture of a community or an ethnic group - there is no constant in any of these.

Ian Sharp and I played footy together and then travelled to University every day for a couple of years. Per Becker was our mate as well, following a similar pathway at least initially.

I was always interested in Per in the sense that he was very alert as to where he was going. He had very strong focus in his family and the fact that he had a much broader view of life, I suspect, than I did not only because of being bi-national but because he could see that theatre and the world of arts was important. He went on and became a successful actor as well as working for Shell in a top position. Per knew where he was going. He was of German background and his father had been with the German army, so he was a refugee in a different sense to many others. He had an elder brother and an elder cousin who were also very astute.

Of that 250 students who started Form 1 when I did, the 20 or 30 who ended up in Year 12 were all people shared substantial cultural capital. Of the very small number of English-speaking kids who started Year 11, I suspect that the predominant number of these that got to Year 12 had that cultural capital, predominantly through having the dominant language. The final year was therefore an unfair representation of those who had started. I remember when kids started to leave school as they got to fifteen thinking 'But that kid's really smart. Why are they leaving school?' It was only later that I realised that smartness and school were not necessarily acquainted. Many of the kids were going off and taking real jobs and doing really important things like learning other skills in the world of work. Those of us who remained were being convinced that we would be part of the new professional class that was growing up after the war. We felt we had to study hard to respond to those expectations because so many of our peers were now breadwinners for their families … a most significant contribution in a struggling community.

Responding to Change

Everyone in St Albans was being changed in the same way as the students were. The high school and the neighbourhood were no longer comprised of people of the same language and cultural background. People were trying to learn from each other and there was a sense of optimism that you would hope would still be in St Albans. It felt to me that we were preparing for growth even though we didn't know where we were going or what we were doing.

There is no doubt in my mind that Sputnik had a huge impact on the course my life has taken. I was probably much more interested in literature and the humanities than I was in science, but after Sputnik any of us who did a reasonable job with figures was encouraged to take sciences as a means of helping the West catching up with the USSR. Whilst I didn't understand this at the time I now recall that the pseudo-clash between sciences and humanities was a very strong topic at that point and there were big arguments about what was most important: cultural transmission or scientific advances. We, who had lasted the distance to Year 12, were all caught up in that. We were told we were going to be new technocrats or part of preserving established culture. So there was again an artificial division between the two groups of kids who left school at the end of 1963. And what a transforming world we were entering!

I suspect that if we looked at every one of those 30 people in that HSC year you would find an interesting history of where they came from. Sneja's father, for instance, was a research chemist from Munich and her grandfather was a journalist of some repute. You had a large number of people who as immigrants were effectively downwardly mobile, whose kids were not going to stay down. That was true of my father in some sense. He didn't complete his secondary education but he came from a wealthy background.

I would be very surprised if any one of those 30 who did Year 12 in that year had started without cultural capital. That continues to be that case with every kid who succeeds. We were all working class economically but we were

not equal in terms of the opportunities we had. The saddest thing of all is we had to learn later that this was an unfair system that continues to be unfair.

Introduction to Football

My interest in football really started with Mum and Dad because they were involved in the community and saw sport, dance, and cultural activity as unifying opportunities. Dad had apparently been a professional football player prior to the war when he was young; this was in another code, rugby, in Sydney.

(Back) I Sharpe, P Metha, H Steigler, P Becker, F Richardts (Second) V Manic, M Neskov, A Lubicz, D Pringle, V Beka, J Darul, G Listopad, E Strehling (Front) L Cameron, S Hubik, P Plain, Mr K Robertson, R Ciolli, R Clifford, I Volkov.

At school we were offered cricket in summer and football in winter. It was the dominant cultural thing that the school tended to reinforce but didn't play a large part in sport other than having token games against other high schools. I certainly wasn't any more athletic than the average kid at the school, but we were the ones who had the support. I probably had a football and someone else didn't. That I had a younger brother, Garry, probably made a difference to that in a big way too - we were able to have a kick together. At 12 or 13 I turned from the boy wimp into the biggest kid at my age level. From that point I was both successful and passionate about football and felt as though I learnt a lot from being part of teams. The school tended to encourage individuality, as most schools do, but the sports ground brought us into ways of uniting.

Les Cameron (second last row, second from left)

St Albans premiership team, 1966.

Football was interesting because it was clearly as high status then as it currently is, but with very little money associated with it. Nobody would have thought that this was career that one should follow. If you were good enough you got a job and you played football, but you wouldn't have been seen as a professional.

League Football

I was given the opportunity of joining Footscray when I was about 17 but it was only 6 months after dad died and there seemed higher priorities. Clubs used to have a rookie list and I made that list but I also got into university. Whilst the result of attending university wasn't guaranteed it was a considerable honour to get there and also I was on a scholarship, so I was fully subsidised, including a wage for the whole period, which is pretty unknown by kids these days with HECS fees and so on.

I decided not to play football at Footscray and continued to play locally, so I almost gave away my opportunity to play at league level but fate had different plans. In 1967 Garry and I went to play at Uni High Old Boys because of his student link there. The coach for that team (and the school, one George Murray) was also a fitness advisor at North Melbourne Football Club. While they were recruiting Garry, who had won the best and fairest player award at the school in 1966, I was also "packaged into a transfer deal.

Inadvertently we negotiated a pretty good financial deal. In those days we were paid $20 to play in the firsts and $3 to play in the seconds. Probably the average weekly wage would not have been much different from $20 at that point. I negotiated brashly I suppose, when I look back, because we had three clubs interested in us: North Melbourne, Fitzroy, and Footscray. They started negotiations by offering us $50 to sign and finished paying $800 to sign for each of us. That was a substantial sum of money for us. It went straight to Mum, who was a widow with five kids, and helped pay debts that were accruing.

We went to North and I played half a dozen games in the seniors and about 20 in the Reserves being part of Premiership with Garry and a lot of future stars (including Carlton and North coach Dennis Pagan and John Scholes who became captain and coach of the Victorian Cricket Team). It was fabulously interesting and I learnt a lot.

The footy was like my science qualification – it gave me a ticket to do things. The combination of teaching and football then allowed me to go and work around country communities. I feel I've lived a privileged life thanks to the combination of achievements (both strongly prompted through Mum and Dad) particularly as they gave me the opportunity to

participate in the community in a way that teachers don't often enjoy without that dual skill.

At schools I tended to be viewed positively because I was a footballer, and viewed as a little bit different at the football club because I was a teacher. It was a very significant advantage. It enabled me to play a political role in those communities that I wouldn't have had if I hadn't had the dual connection.

Teaching

I came out of university in 1968 into my first year of teaching. I realised pretty early that there are dangers in the inspirational model - I wasn't drawing the best out of others - I was more Pied Piper or Miss Jean Brodie. There were enormous changes occurring across the world. The French students were in the streets overturning and burning cars and trying to overturn the government. The students, blacks, and young people in America were fighting for civil rights. Australians were on the point of tossing over 20 years of Liberal government. Feminism was being muttered if not shouted and a radical period in a period of new affluence was sweeping Western Culture.

Unlike our parents we weren't the kids who were going to count our pennies and put away bits of string because we were worried about the next depression. JFK had become President of the USA at 43 and had left a legacy of youthful confidence. Through the 50s and 60s we'd watched as migrants, women, Catholics and working people were locked out of opportunities. As their sons and daughters we knew that sort of stuff had to be changed, and we were part of that radical vanguard wanting to change it. From day one in teaching I was on the streets protesting about too many kids and too few resources in the classroom. It was a very heady period.

When I started teaching I had 55 kids in the classroom. I don't remember being one of 55 in a class at St Albans but I probably was, so management issues were crazy. When I started teaching there were 30 sessions in a week and we would be teaching 28 and then taking a sports session for the other two. There was no time for preparation, which is one of the things we later fought for. I remember half the time in my first couple of years walking to the next classroom wondering what I was going to teach for the next period. That must have been even worse at St Albans because there were probably a number of teachers who were not well qualified in the formal sense.

Heywood Alternative School

I went into teaching thinking I could offer the stuff Geoff Reid or Mary Myer or George Sinclair were offering: an inspirational, enthusiastic, and passionate profile that would transform kids into motivated learners.

I quickly became very disenchanted with the enculturation models of education that I had grown up with as I could see knowledge-based curricula always gave those who had the dominant culture the opportunity to move forward more easily. I had been part of a number of noble experiments in school change at Birchip and Warrnambool but the turning point in teaching for me was in Heywood in 1973. Whitlam was PM, Medibank and the Schools Commission had been established, and a wash of great, radical educational thinking was challenging world views on education. I had been struggling to get changes in the school because I thought it was appalling education for kids to be following a curriculum that was set 200 miles and 100 hundred years distant from the real lives of these kids. The other teachers had the majority and they didn't want to move away from conventional modes of teaching. Schools had by this time been handed back the right to control the schools up to Year 11 by the Education Department. The time had come for schools to take more control and respond to their kids. As a result of a few circumstances I got the chance to start one of the first alternative schools in Victoria. The same year Swinburne Community School and Huntingdale Tech opened following similar directions.

Danny Vadasz from St Albans joined me in Heywood. At that stage he was a student in Dip Ed at Monash. We were able to negotiate that he came down and effectively did a full-time placement with me and stayed with us. He was fantastic. In that period I learnt many things about kids that I didn't think I ever could have understood in the traditional structure.

With the blessing of School Principal Jack Finck we moved into an old house close to the school and established what would still be considered to be radical education. We had effectively an adolescent kindergarten with self-directed learning in a communal setting. People from all parts of the country flocked to this simple school of 30 kids. Free and open discussion on all manner of topics ensued. People, each with their own passion for something, challenged and were challenged by these kids in and out of the school hours on politics, art, feminism, drugs and abortion.

It was a very rich three months of discussing urban alienation and problems of society. One of my fellow teachers Graeme Mathews who was very much a long-haired surfer boy and sympathetic to the direction, pointed out however: "You've done extremely well here. Absolutely all of these kids are singing Bob Dylan or Paul Simon, believing the world is a rat race, and that cement and tar are weighing us down. The trouble is you are 200 kilometres away from Melbourne and these kids are country kids and not city dwellers."

And he was quite right. I had done exactly what “Jean Brodie” had done in terms of persuading people to follow my life.

From there we effectively stopped the curriculum and asked the kids what they wanted to do. For a while there was a bit of a hiatus but soon the kids took control and developed a jungle curriculum. Observing them I realised these kids were real kids with real relationships and that with their parents, the real direction of their lives had already been set What we teachers had (and have) been doing was steamrolling over the top of that with our culture … alternative or conventional.

Seeking a New Pedagogy

From that time forward I have tried to search for a pedagogy that has the school as servant to the learner’s needs. I have tried to help the student identify what he or she wants and then tried to arrange mentoring and tutoring from good exemplars or supporters. I feel I am incredibly lucky that those kids at Heywood in 1973 taught me my most important lesson as a teacher.

We began to realise that the same sort of thing was happening in America, England and Europe, but almost every one of those was supported not by the state but by private fellowships. You might find a school supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, which would have been operating from a shop on the street front with 30 kids. We certainly gained strength and communicated with some of these. There was hence a great sense that this was about a genuine and radical attempt to say what the kids on the streets of France were saying, or Bob Dylan was telling us, that the world can be a better place if we were all treated as equal. There was a real sense of collectivism.

We had these schools across the world but where it was particularly interesting for us was that the failure of the Bolte government to properly plan for the post-war population growth meant that many schools were struggling just to accommodate their kids. When this group of radicals came along and said “we’ll teach kids in a church hall or an old house and run our school that way”, this most conservative of governments allowed us to do the most radical things because it was pragmatic.

We were funded by the state: our wages were still met, the accommodation was usually cheaper than any school building, and the fact that parents were involved gave us a real solid chance that what we were doing in a radical and refreshing way would succeed.

Throughout the '70s and '80s I worked in schools like Heywood, at Warrnambool, St Kilda, Collingwood and Kensington. I used to argue at all of them that our philosophies were right but our educational theory was lousy. We understood that kids needed to feel free to find their own direction. If that meant sitting around all day reading a book that wouldn’t have been so bad. If they sat around wishing to read a book but couldn’t read because no one had intervened, then that obviously meant the cultural capitalists had won and our “come and have a good time and learn as you go” was not really strong enough. We really had to rethink our theory. Many of those schools collapsed because they emphasised individuality and not development.

Educational Consultant

In my search for a good pedagogy I became a consultant to the state government on literacy matters and a consultant for the Australian Schools Commission. Out of chance I realised that the work of James Brittain on how kids learn to speak largely through informal and unstructured experience was my Grail. From that point all my educational efforts have been to create a learning environment similar to that created in every home that welcomes a new baby home!

I was involved with the Labor Party through most of this time because of the radical thrust of social justice that had flowed through the party after the split and into the '60s and been enflamed during the early '70s with Whitlam achieving Government.

On the Education Committee and through this I met Bruce Wilson, a lecturer at Melbourne Uni. He was chairperson of the Kensington Community School, committed to developing a working class curriculum and a brilliant theorist. I was there about four years as coordinator and probably would still be there except for some personal relationship issues. To me, what we were doing there was fantastic. There are a lot of positive stories to be told about the school. I believe it proved that the combination of the right philosophy and the right theory can transform kids’ lives. It generated interest and we were much lauded by the educational community of the time. I believe many of our initiatives have now been encapsulated into later work such as the VCAL inauguration.

Educational Advisor with the Food Unions

In the late 1980s I took a position with four food unions as their educational advisor; Bill Kelty was in control of the ACTU and Bob Hawke was PM. As a result of declining manufacturing base Hawke and Kelty had supported change, to workplace based education. This absolutely suited the model of community education that I been part of. I moved to Chisholm TAFE and for ten years I managed a group that was very much focussed on how to support workers in the food industry. That was very much based on the notions of how to organise yourself and how rather than take people out of work and replace them you took people who were in the factory and treated them as though they were worthy

and dignified. We simply gave them access to information from which they had been blocked.
Australian Vocational Training Institute

What I've done in the last ten to fifteen years has been to work broadly in that field, and now the aged care area. The interest in the aged care area was prompted by the bad treatment received by Mum during a bout of ill health. The aged care area is another one where we have a long way to go before we can be proud of our culture support for our elders.

I am currently the Director of the Australian Vocational Training Institute, a Registered Training Organisation which is part of the TAFE system. I see us as a flexible TAFE where we go to people in their workplaces rather than them coming to us. I am pleased and proud of the work we have done in helping unqualified but highly skilled workers in food and aged care achieve the status they deserve.

Reflections on St Albans

The contribution of St Albans High over 50 years in some senses is through its hidden curriculum. It has taken the world's migrants and given them a chance to talk to each other. It has supported families and kids through tough times and given them a platform for securing a better future. Whether the teaching was good enough, the resources suitable, or the outcomes all they could be, the participants in St Albans High School have gained from the connections. I am proud to have been a student there, I learnt a lot while I was there and I continue to build on what was learnt. A school can do no more than offer that to its graduates.

As a student, and young teacher I was inspired by a Radical Education Dossiers (yes, there were such publications in the '70s) where the eleventh law of radical teaching is "don't be co-opted but don't be sacked".

I think that's where I've spent my life. I'm not co-opted into believing that the current system is the best it can be and, if I can hang in somewhere on the margins and try to make the opportunities better, then I shall.

Les Cameron, 2006

Julian Castagna: Film Producer, Winemaker

Julian Castagna is a former pupil of St. Albans High School who always had an interest in drama and theatre. He was introduced to film production when he started working for the ABC as a mail boy. He was quick to take the opportunities that presented themselves and was soon Directing a popular ABC television music show, 'The Hit Parade', as well as running his own discotheque - one of the first in Melbourne. But it was in England that his interest in film-making blossomed into a career that kept him occupied for sixteen years. His overseas experiences began in Sweden and Spain where he worked, at first, for a pittance, which enabled him to extend his experience as a Director and Producer. And, from there, Castagna went on to establish himself in London and form his own production company where he started making mainly advertising films that took him to places like Paris, Rome, New York, and Los Angeles.

He is now back in Australia, and though still involved with film-making to some extent, has taken a major career change to produce wines which are amongst the top-quality in Australian boutique wineries. The Castagna vineyard is run biodynamically as is Cullen from Margaret River and Jasper Hill in Heathcote. Ron Laughton of Jasper Hill in Heathcote and Julian Castagna of Castagna in Beechworth are almost neighbours, historically speaking, because Ron grew up in Sydenham while Julian was just down the road in St Albans.

Castagna's small vineyard produces Shiraz, Viognier, and Sangiovese wines that are receiving critical acclaim on the Australian wine scene. He has also established a reputation for being a guru in the relatively new biodynamic philosophy of viticulture, and has exhibited his wines in Bordeaux (2003) and New York (2004) San Francisco, Tokyo, London, Brussels (2005) as part of a 'best of the best exhibition' featuring biodynamic wines from a dozen countries. It is by invitation only and only the top-drawer are invited. Also Castagna took the opportunity to expand this international tasting concept into an educational and promotional event by hosting via Biodynamic Agriculture Australia, the first International Biodynamic Wine Forum at La Trobe University, in Beechworth (2004) which attracted viticulturists from as far afield as Chile and France.

Running a small winery is not a get rich quick venture, in fact, many small wine producers operate on margins as low as 1%-4%. Castagna's output is about 1,000 cases a year,

which he admits is 'right on the edge' financially speaking, but the lifestyle is priceless.

Coming to Australia

I was born Guliano Castagna on top of a hilled village named Montona in the province of Trieste, in Italy. In Australia I became known as Julian. My mother and father arrived in Australia in 1951 under refugee status with no money. They brought with them the clothes on their backs and a copper pot for cooking polenta - which I still have. My parents came from a tiny village where making a living in Italy's post-war conditions was difficult; migration was a solution accepted by many.

I think I remember (or it may simply be family folk-lore) lining up to board a ship with my family, and my mother's sister's family - who was in front of us in the queue - to board whichever boat came along. My mother's sister boarded the ship for America and then a barrier came down. The ship was full. The next boat was bound for Australia. So, that's how we came to Australia. It sounds implausible in this day and age but it's very much how my father told the story. My mother remembers me crying because I wanted us to go with Zia.

My mother never forgot that there were only two countries in the world who would take people without 'papers': America and Australia - and with the polenta pot in her hand and me and my father flanking her, she thanked God for both of them.

(Bringing to mind my parents' relocation to Australia I'm struck by how courageous they were: they didn't speak the language; they didn't have any money, nor did they understand the currency; they didn't have jobs; they didn't know where they were going to live; they didn't even have a friend.)

Family

My father Pietro (Peter) Castagna was a stonemason in Italy, and when he came to Australia he worked in a factory at first and eventually as a brick layer and a sort-of builder - not a big-time one. We settled in Main Road West, St Albans, at first in a one-roomed bungalow which my father built and which ended up housing the now six of us till my youngest sister was born five or six years later. Being a stonemason my father had the skill to build a brick house for us whereas many other places were being built of weatherboard. He worked in a factory on night shift so he could build the house in daylight hours.

My father really was a worker rather than a thinker. He thought that hard labour was what you did to get on, whereas I always said success is in the head - anyone can do physical work, but very few people can think. My father didn't really want me to go on at school as he saw that I had abilities to help his business grow. If it wasn't for my mother I probably would have left school at fourteen. My mother is very bright and understood that education was very important.

I have four sisters, all younger than me. I'm quite different to them. They've happily settled in the western suburbs of Melbourne, whereas I couldn't wait to get out. I've never been able to accept that an accident of birth should control or dictate your life. It never occurred to me that anyone could be restricted in their aspirations by where they came from - I've never had any fear in that regard.

Primary School

I first went to St Albans State School in May 1951. I have no memory of it other than my mother coming to the school at lunchtime to bring me freshly squeezed plum juice and something freshly made each day because I didn't want to eat what was on offer at the school tuck shop.

In 1953 I transferred to Sunshine Catholic School, Our Lady's, a school which I hated. I was there from Grade 3 to Grade 6. There was only one good teacher in that whole school - such an indictment of that system. I remember one particular nun, the only one there with any humanity - I wish I could remember her name as she used to tell us such wonderful stories. She would take us into the room where all the sports and gym equipment was stored; it was just a little junk room really with a vaulting horse and quite crowded too. She'd seat the kids around the room and tell stories. I remember it as very important - I suspect it is from her that I first understood about theatre through story telling and her dramatisation of the story. I can still see her dressed up in her nun's habit and wimple putting dramatic emphasis into her stories, which really impressed me.

I have also many awful memories of that school. I can remember at one general assembly a boy not more than 6 or 7 who had not turned up for a sports carnival, because his parents wouldn't permit it, being beaten by the headmistress on the stage the next morning in front of the whole school with strips of rubber linoleum and hitting him until his legs bled. Those are powerful memories of injustice for a young boy and the attitude formed from them very much effects how I am today.

Competence in English

When my parents came to Australia in the early fifties I guess I didn't speak any English, though I never remember not being able to speak English. Neither of my parents ever spoke English well. My father died three years ago and he still only spoke broken English. My mother speaks some English but is in no way fluent. That didn't seem to be a problem for us kids -

communication was never a problem. St Albans in those early days was very multi-cultural. I remember a newspaper coming to take a photo of the school and a panoramic photograph of the school kids and there were 46 nationalities represented. It's amazing. Looking back at it now I guess it would be considered as an underprivileged school. I never saw that at all.

High School

I started high school in 1957, the second year of the school, the first year in its present location. Barker was the Principal then, and though I think he never got the credit he deserved he was a fantastic headmaster. I don't think he was a great educator but he was a great inspirer and a courageous man. I think life is about courage and he inspired and encouraged both staff and pupils. There were never restrictions in those early years, whereas as the school got bigger everything became restricted. I stayed there right through to Matric. Some of the teachers that I remember with some fondness are Reid, Strauss, Gliddon, and Alcorn It's not that I disliked the other teachers, but some of them were very wishy-washy, and because I didn't engage in the system we didn't understand each other very well. The only teacher I engaged with was Tom 'Doc' Walsh who undoubtedly had a powerful influence on my life and future career.

St Albans High School Form 5, 1961

I became part of Doc Walsh's dramatic group which was not part of the school but a group drawn from children from several schools. That group was called Electra Dramatic - I have my blazer pocket badge framed on my study wall. That's how I got to travel Australia, by performing plays in various towns and cities round Australia. It was probably in 1958 when all this started. I remember my parents couldn't afford the uniform that was required to go on tour and Doc helped with the cost. That's why I worked at various shops after school from an early age, to earn money for that sort of stuff.

[Julian Castagna, third from right, on stage with Doc Walsh.]
Julian Castagna, third from right, with Doc Walsh and the drama group, 1960s.

Impressions of School

I was fortunate as I think I had one or two very good teachers - although we had some awful ones too. The most important teacher for me was Doc Walsh; he showed me that I had something different to offer. People like Strauss and Gliddon were really bright people: It was the first time I saw brightness and cleverness.

M Bowkun, V Mahorin, G Castagna, R Kiss,
Mr Conroy, Mrs Gliddon, S Gunew, R Keegan.

School, for me, was never just about learning, school was an experience: I knew where I was going; I knew where I wanted to go when I was very young; I knew that I wanted to be in something to do with theatre-drama. I knew almost instinctively, but you couldn't talk about it, being an migrant Italian boy from St Albans. But I knew then what I wanted to do. My father of course thought it was all nonsense - he thought I should learn to do something practical - like building. He strongly disapproved of my acting and didn't come to see any play I was in until I was about 18.

I have no idea why I was so interested in drama. I think it may have been because of radio, because I listened to the radio a lot and the spoken word has always been of interest to me. I've always been able to see images.

School was a process, nothing else. It's the good teachers that made a difference. Having raised two children I've seen first-hand how lucky one is to have good teachers. One son didn't have one in this whole school life the other had one - it makes a big difference. I can think of four good teachers during my time at school, so I think we were pretty lucky.

Part-time Work

I worked every night after school, every Saturday and most Sundays, at two places. One was Joe's Fruit Shop, which was later called St

Albans Fruit Supply. I worked there for a long time, working after school and on Saturdays.

The rest of the time I worked at the local delicatessen. That was in Main Road, right down towards the end, run by a couple of guys who didn't live in St. Albans. There was a huge Polish-Russian population there and that's why I call it a delicatessen rather than a milk bar. The customers would only speak to you in Russian, Polish, Yiddish, whatever their mother-tongue was so you had to learn. You didn't learn it fluently, but you learnt enough. I needed the job because I needed the money. They paid me little enough, but that didn't matter. If you wanted the job that's what you did. I was always good with mental arithmetic and the owners were impressed by that. They'd say, "No, no, you've got it wrong" and then they'd write it down, add it up, and say, "You're right." I would have been about 14.

Svetlana Bohudski was another student from the high school who was working at the same delicatessen. I first met Svetlana at school. She was going out with Tom Ciesniewski, who was a friend of mine. Svetlana was part of the school drama group, and was in the play called Lilac Time. Even though I wouldn't act in the school plays I would help with makeup and the like. We used to do performances at Sunshine Town Hall.

I worked all through secondary school until I joined the ABC. I worked either at the delicatessen or the fruit shop. The fruit shop was every Saturday morning, because along with my pay I would get some of the fruit that couldn't be sold and that would give our family fruit for the week.

Study Habits

I didn't study and never did any concentrated work for school. I recognised early that one of the skills I had was a very good auditory memory so I worked to buy a tape recorder so that I could dictate on to it what I had learnt in my lessons at the end of each day and then replay it. I was eleven. I passed exams by reading the set text into a tape recorder and then listening to it, and during exams it would just all come back, I could 'hear' it. It was a process for me, rather than something to learn.

Character Traits

Both my parents were conservative and not prone to risk-taking, my mother still is very conservative. There is no doubt that there was great love and great hope for me from them. I know that when I went on those trips with Doc Walsh they sometimes didn't eat to allow me to do it - quite powerful - and that wouldn't have happened without my mother. My father wouldn't have allowed it.

In truth, I think we're born with what we are. We are what we are. Some of us use that given talent and some don't, but it's always based on who we are and what makes us tick. I guess we're taught a bit, but I think it's mostly innate. I know that I behave in a repetitive manner, differently, but the things that make me react are always the same. If I see someone being treated unfairly, I react. If I see someone not accepting responsibility, I react. Even with my boys. I suspect I'm not an easy father to have because I can be pretty tough. I think the boys are only now starting to understand me. We have a wonderful relationship, but I'm not an easy parent to live with.

Attitudes to School

My children don't feel warmly about their school life and they had a much more salubrious education than I did, whereas I do feel warmly about the school in the first part of my life. I felt it was an important 'basic' to my start in life. I feel warmly towards the school even though I didn't like some of the teachers. Torpey, the third headmaster was the first person that I recognised that I didn't like - I don't mean dislike - I just felt that his energy was negative he was a bureaucrat first and a educator second. We ended up having bureaucrats at St Albans. Barker, our first headmaster, was always a teacher first and therefore attracted staff who had energy.

I think that St. Albans, in its early years, was a unique school. It schooled sons of migrants who where hungry for knowledge and success. The school that my sisters went to - same school - was a totally different school to the one I went to. They started in the mid-sixties or a bit earlier. Leadership became bureaucratic rather than inspirational.

I can't think of a major negative experience with any of my teachers, though I think there were teachers who were not very good, but that's a retrospective perception. At the time I thought it was me not being clever enough to understand what they were talking about. Despite that, it's been an extremely important part of my life because it created who I am, and sometimes it's a bit of a monster, in the sense that I think fairness is absolute, and therefore if I see unfairness I react in a way that is very powerful, and sometimes that is inappropriate. Fairness, both giving and receiving has become an important part of my life. I don't know whether that's also to do with my upbringing, that is, coming from immigrant parents where you saw people having a tough time.

As a young child, I remember door-to-door salesmen coming to the house and giving my mother their chat. She would buy something from them with a precious shilling believing what they told her was true only to find it broke or

disintegrated very quickly. It bothered me greatly that someone had been dishonest with her.

Working for the ABC

I feel my time at St Albans was very positive because of the spirit and the energy of the school. I did Matriculation and then went to the ABC. I was going to go to university when the ABC offered me a job as a mail boy; I said no. I went home and thought that was stupid of me, because working for the ABC was exactly what I wanted to do. So I went back and said yes. I worked at the ABC for about two to three years before going to London.

Once I was at the ABC I had access to equipment - I did things. I was one of the few really young people there and I was prepared to work for nothing just to have the opportunity to improve myself. I'd work at night using the machinery that was available to me. I started a discotheque when no one else was doing it. In fact, I had one of the first discotheques in Melbourne, a place called The Mad Hatter in Little Lonsdale Street. I was working on a pop program for the ABC, so I would audition the people at the discotheque, and that's how I came across all these great bands. We had people like Mick Hadley and Lobby Loyde from the Purple Hearts, The Loved Ones with Gerry Humphrys were regular performers, and others included Running, Jumping, Standing Still. The Mad Hatter didn't last for very long but it was popular because it featured live bands as well as the latest pop records. My three teen-age colleagues in this business were Sue Johns, Boris Damast and Jim Byrnes - I was the senior partner because I was aged 21. Sue was the one responsible for the decor and decorations inspired by the characters from Alice in Wonderland.

Working with the presentation staff at the ABC I very soon realised I had skills as a director. At that stage the ABC had a policy of promoting people from the inside. As people were promoted others would be given a try-out in their position by being put in that job temporarily. If you could do it well you got the job permanently. It was a great time to be at the ABC. Again, it was a process. My ambition was to become a TV producer and I was planning to go to America and study at the Los Angeles University. I tried very hard and was accepted into the UCLA Film course, but the big disappointment for me at the time was I just couldn't raise all the money. Had I got in I would have been there at the same time as Coppola, Lucas and the like.

Working in Europe

Then I went to Europe. I left Australia because I hated Melbourne and I hated St Albans. I was also called up for national service which was another good reason to leave. At that stage you still had the right to go overseas as long as you signed a piece of paper to say you'd go into the army when you got back. I didn't want to go into the army so I just went away and didn't come back until Whitlam got in and abolished the call-up.

First we went to Sweden, and that was fairly disastrous. We had been doing a programme at the ABC called The Hit Parade, which a Producer from Sweden had seen and invited us to do something similar in Sweden. Boris Damast (who was a partner in the discotheque venture) and I were really responsible for it. At that stage I was a Gramophone Operator but I was also directing The Hit Parade. It was cute. We had a Presenter and we would do things that lots of people do now, such as quote lines out of comedy and the Presenter would have to give off-the-cuff answers. It was quick, smart, and funny. No one else was doing anything like that at the time. When I tried to reproduce that in Sweden it was a disaster. I didn't recognise that much of the success of what I was doing at the ABC was because I had help from all the other crew members. We did a bit of thinking but the crew did all the work getting the cameras in the right place at the right time, being ready for the jokes. In Sweden no one was helping me. They'd say, "You're the expert. Show us. Tell us where you want the cameras to be, tell us what you want us to do." It was terrible. I had lots of ideas but I didn't know how to do it, whereas at the ABC all these guys knew what to do and did it. I'd point and say, "That one there, that one there ..." It's a wonder they didn't kill me.

After Sweden we went to Spain for a while, and then the UK.

Working in England

I was in the UK for sixteen years, and from there I was making film and working all over the place: Rome, Los Angeles, New York. It was tough financially at the start. Carolann wasn't working at that stage. She was trying to be a writer, we had kids, and buying houses in London was expensive. When I first got to England I didn't have any contacts, so I knocked on doors. It took a while. I got caught working without a union ticket - at that time England was very unionised, so you couldn't work unless you had a union ticket, and couldn't get a union ticket unless you had a job! I worked for nothing at first and didn't care, because I wanted to gain an understanding of the industry. I eventually got a job that I suspect no one else wanted, but it got me a union ticket and that got me back into the film industry. They'd say "Can you do this?" and I'd say yes to whatever they were asking about. I remember working in Spain as an assistant director and the producer fired the director and

turned to me, "You can do that job can't you?" I said yes.

Carolann and Julian Castagna, London

Filmmaking in Australia

We got to a point in the UK where we had to make a decision whether our children were going to be educated in London or in Australia. The oldest one had just started school; we decided on Australia.

I've had wonderful experiences and been lucky, really. When I came back in 1981 I went straight into film. I came back to make a film about Cyclone Tracy but in the end the script was not one I wanted to make, so I started a production company that made advertising films - which became quite successful. People gave me lots of work - the work was very inventive. There's a camera attached to a Lear jet called Astrovision. I brought that to Australia in 1982, just after I came back. TAA gave me an airbus for a fortnight to film their major corporate commercial. We were flying around Sydney Harbour quite low and people were phoning the police to report a little aeroplane attacking this big passenger jet. Spy stuff they thought it was, and it was just us getting in very close to film it. The publicity did us no harm at all though.

Making Wine

We'd been looking for a new challenge but had nothing definite in mind. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable because I was just working for money and that made me uneasy; advertising was going nowhere. We decided to look for something in the country, take it easy, and keep doing a bit of work. Then I suggested to my wife that we could make a little wine. Everything we've ever earned is in these 50 acres of land. If it hadn't worked ...

I have no understanding of failure; none whatsoever. I don't accept failure as a possibility in life. I've never had an experience that in the end hasn't been in some way or other positive. Never.

When I started my winery my mother said, "You know, your grandfather (Barbarossa) made wine."

I said, "Yes, I know he made his own wine."

"No," she said, "you don't listen do you? He made wine."

I said, "You've always told us he made his own wine."

She said, "No, no. He had a vineyard and was a winemaker. That was his business and that's how we lived. And he brought the first hand plough from Egypt."

I actually went back and stood in my grandfather's vineyard a couple of years ago. That was interesting. I seem to have a natural ability to make wine but I've no idea where that came from. I know where my palate's come from, but I have no science background. It was interesting to stand on a bit of land that belonged to my grandfather and feel the energy. That was on my mother's side. I never met him and have no memory of him. He is a photograph.

I have had no formal training as a wine maker, but I have a good palate and therefore I knew I could make good wine; it isn't brain surgery. French and Italian farmers have been making very good wine for centuries. I was lucky in that I have had the opportunity to experience great wines throughout my life. While I was working as a film Producer, I enjoyed many of the top French and Italian reds. I was living in London when there was a huge amount of wonderful wine available at fair prices and I had the opportunity to experience it. I'd say to people, "Let's go to lunch." I'd pick people up at half past ten, take a car to the airport, get on the aeroplane and take them to lunch in Paris. All of that was available to me, and it was available to me because I was working for a successful company.

When I was looking for land to buy in Victoria I came across Rick Kinzbrunner, who had established his Giaconda winery just outside Beechworth. I ended up buying 50 acres of land not far from Kinzbrunner on a hilltop overlooking a scenic rural landscape. I was interested in making Shiraz which was less dominated by oak and more suited to a variety of foods, though I do use French oak for maturing my wines. I add a very small proportion of Viognier to the Shiraz as they do on the Northern Rhone. I had been impressed by some of the Italian wines made from the Sangiovese grape particularly the classic wines from Tuscany. I thought the soil and climate of Beechworth was also suitable for this Italian grape, so I planted some of that as well.

We established the vineyard and winery in 1996. We did a lot of the work ourselves, with help. Whenever a job was too big or hard for us we brought in help, and when they'd done the

hard bits we finished it off ourselves. We built out of straw bales.

The initial plantings were 70% Shiraz, 20% Sangiovese (all Brunello), and 10% Viognier. For many years, people assumed that the Beechworth terroir was like Burgundy because of Kinzbrunner's success with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Then in 1999, research into Italian grape varieties in Australia identified Beechworth as a great spot for Sangiovese, but by then I had already established my vineyard, so I was already ahead of the research. I simply looked at the soil and saw there was so much similarity to areas of Tuscany that it is quite amazing.

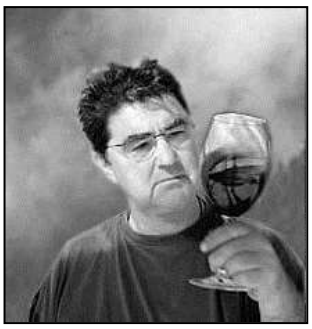
When I planted the vines there was some infestation by the African black beetle. I bought the recommended pesticide and was going to spray the vineyard. I read that you had to wear protective clothing as well as a respirator and had to see a doctor immediately if you spilt any of the chemical on your hands or body. I decided that was not something I wanted to use on my land. I did some research about the beetle and found that it usually fed on grass roots, but if you remove all the grass - and I had ploughed all the mid-rows - the beetle will transfer to the vine roots, being the next best thing to their normal preference. So I let the grass grow back and the beetles went back to that and left the vines alone. That's one of the reasons we decided to adopt biodynamic practices for the vineyard, to learn to live with nature rather than try to defeat it. It is more labour intensive and requires more vigilance to ensure healthy vines, but there are no chemical costs and the quality of the wine and the environment are much the better for it.

The biodynamic approach is not the same as organic farming, as biodynamics uses more of a homeopathic approach in using small amounts of additives as catalysts to free up nutrients in the soil.

The harvesting season means seven weeks of 18-hour days packed with anxiety and fatigue for the grape-picking team of family, friends and willing neighbours, just for the right to turn up next year and do it all again. (I think it takes a year to forget it's hard yakka and remember it romantically, just in time for them to enroll all over again.) My son Adam also puts in long hours of help to make sure the vintage is in on time.

Current Activities

I travel a lot, more than I care to at times. I'm Chair of the Biodynamic Association of Australia and on a couple of boards, so that requires travel. I've just come back from Shanghai, where we were invited to be part of a trade mission. I'm still playing with film a bit. Carolann is a writer and we're trying to pull something together at the moment. That's taking up a bit of time. She's written a film I'd like to make, but I'm no longer as good at getting money as I was. Suddenly, having to find four million bucks is a bit complicated.



Julian Castagna, 2005.

Castagna family: Carolann (gardener, viticulturer, researcher and writer), sons Alexi (film-maker), Adam (winemaker), and Julian Castagna (padrone).
Photo by Philip White http://drinkster.blogspot.com/2011/11/castagna-opens-to-falcons-thunder.html

Phillip Cini : Student 1971 - 1972

My name is Phil Cini and I was born in Melbourne in 1959 as a descendent of the Portelli and Cini families, so I am proud to be an Australian of Maltese heritage. As well as being Australian-born I have been a St Albans boy for most of my life.

It was to escape the deprivation and ravages of the Second World War that my mother Tessie Portelli's family left the austerity of post-war Malta in 1949. Their story is reminiscent of the dislocation of thousands of others who left their homes of birth on the other side of the world to make St Albans their home.

The Portelli family

The Portelli's lifelong journey began in the latter days of the 1920s in Malta. Mary Pirotta and Paul Portelli had married in 1919. Mary, slight and pretty, was from the village of Birkirkara. Paul, from Qormi, was an able man - tall, tough and wiry, he bore an uncanny resemblance to John Wayne the actor. Apart from the naval dockyards in Valleta's Grand Harbour or low-income government utility work, Malta's only offering of secure employment was backbreaking work in stone masonry, building, or tending fields from early dawn to dusk. Migration was the only way out of a life of drudgery.

The year 1926 saw Paul Portelli migrate to the United States to secure a better future, leaving behind his wife and two daughters, Georgia and Stella. From New York then on to Chicago he made his way to California, obtaining work in the docks of San Francisco Bay, loading and unloading cargo on ships. It was the time of a new phenomenon originating in America called mass consumerism and work was plentiful.

Having spent several years securing a home base, he returned to Malta for a brief spell before setting sail again, this time with his family back to the States - to a new life in a new country. San Francisco, where the suburbs comprised of different ethnic groups heading down to Fishermans Wharf, was now home for the young, growing family. The Golden Gate Bridge which was still under construction and Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary in the middle of the bay provided a scenic backdrop.

Six more children would be born to them in the following decade of the depression-era thirties. My mum, Tessie (Theresa) was born in 1932 on the 27th of February, sharing the same day of birth with actress Elizabeth Taylor. San Francisco was a well-established cosmopolitan melting pot of multi-culturalism nestled around the bay area. There were a number of Maltese families living in the Italian quarter known as Little Italy in the North Beach area. Chinatown and other communities also were in established quarters. Then came the Great Depression of the thirties resulting in less demand for manufactured goods and reduced hours of employment. Many banks and businesses shut their doors. Soup kitchens became a common sight in major cities. People moved from mundane job to mundane job trying to eke out an income, and the same applied to Paul Portelli. The days of milk and honey had become the days of sour grapes.

Whether for lack of work opportunity or homesickness or both, the Portellis decided to migrate back to Malta when they travelled on the Queen Mary before it was requisitioned as a troopship. It was a case of bad timing. They returned only to find themselves on the threshold of a major European conflict, with Italy declaring war against Britain and the tiny British colony of Malta, only 60 miles south of Sicily, was first in the firing line. On 10 June 1940, the first of countless air raids took place.

The Portelli's story, along with the rest of the populace, was of submission to fear and deprivation due to the ravages of constant air raids. But it was also a story of fortitude against the odds. For a brief period in 1942, Malta was the most bombed place on earth but the island held its own. As 1942 dragged on, whatever shipping convoys made it to the island were able to replenish vital stores of goods needed to fight back. Food, ammunitions, and fuel all guaranteed to keep Malta from capitulation. Eventually the tide would turn when Malta was used as a stepping stone for the Allies to attack the Axis powers through Sicily, and the rest is history. The Maltese had at last received some respite and the island now faced the task of restructure. It was the same all over Europe and everyone had a story to tell. For many, migration was the only key to a better future.

The Portelli family along with many hopefuls decided to start afresh through migration. Paul, now fifty-four, was first to arrive in Australia and the rest of the family followed, three by three, to their final destination. The year was 1949. It was the start of the great migrant influx the likes of which Australia had not

seen since the gold rush days of the 1850s.

Initially residing in North Melbourne, Paul found work in Geelong at the Ford Motor Company. Within two years the family were once more together - my grandmother with aunts Sylvia and young Cathy being the last to arrive.

For many other migrants, St Albans and neighbouring West Sunshine offered the best opportunity to start anew. Around 1951-52 the Portellis purchased a block of land in Walmer Avenue next door to the Walker's residence. Within a short time the weatherboard at number 30 was constructed and to this day it has withstood the test of time. St Albans was their final hometown and from where the Portellis, one by one, would start families of their own making. There is a photograph of my grandmother, Mary Portelli nee Pirotta, standing in the yard with the stark background of an empty horizon along Biggs Street and beyond, which pretty much sums up St Albans as a suburb yet in the making.

Granddad was now able to work closer to home at the ICI complex at Deer Park as a cleaner. Apart from the weatherboard house his other investments were a small property up in Wandin along with an old AEC tray truck with which he'd cart firewood to take back to St Albans with help from his sons Tony and Frank. Granddad's personal means of transport was a late thirties straight eight Oldsmobile sedan which he drove to work during the week and on Saturday to Victoria Market to haul back the weekly groceries.

Saga of a migrant family

The weathered Oldsmobile sedan turned off the unsealed road onto a dirt driveway at 30 Walter Avenue. There were few houses then in the sparse windswept paddocks of St Albans, home to the wildlife of rabbits and tiger snakes and copperheads that slithered about in the grassy, rocky landscape. An old weatherboard house and a bungalow lined the street and, beyond, the timber skeletons of dwellings in the making broke up the monotonous landscape.

To this backup, Paul Portelli returned home after a mundane working day at the ICI complex at nearby Deer Park. Awaiting him were his wife and four daughters and two sons to commence their evening supper. It was not served until he took his place at the kitchen table and a prayer of thanksgiving was offered. A bowl of chicken soup and thick slices of day-old bread, followed by black, sweetened coffee, comprised the evening meal.

Devout Catholics, the solemn recital of praying the rosary would be prayed in a monotone as an act of tradition, faith and hope for a rosy future. The perception of future lay in the hands of the Almighty and whatever devices would be of their making. As for the present, a bakelite wireless would be turned on for the latest news broadcast and the weather report. On occasion one of three married daughters would pay a visit while their father would play traditional folk music on his battered acoustic guitar while his daughter Theresa would accompany him, making up the words as she sang along, which was the Maltese custom. Paul Portelli would then call it a day amongst the many days that passed into the recesses of his memory in his checkered yet eventful life.

On Saturday mornings, the family sedan would be driven to the Victoria market which offered more variety for grocery shopping than the half-dozen or so shops situated at St Albans. Occasionally, Paul and Mary would pay a visit at St Francis Church in the heart of the city or at St Mary's in Victoria Street. At the time there was no market or a Catholic church to cater for the migrants settling into St Albans. Sunday Mass was held at the Mechanics Institute – a weatherboard community building situated on the East Esplanade opposite the train station, where a priest would make his way from Sunshine to preside over the small but growing Catholic population. The sound of the Mass would sometimes be drowned out momentarily by a passing steam locomotive billowing smoke and steam as it crossed the Main Road junction. It would remind Mary of the time Malta had its own railway line which ran right behind their residence back in Birkirkara.

After lunch on weekends the four sisters would indulge in a little recreation. With what was left of their weekly income after paying for board and assistance, they'd catch a train into Sunshine or the city to watch a matinee movie or just walk past an array of shops and stop for a coffee and a laugh. St Albans offered no venues where people could gather for a bit of R and R except for sporting events at Errington Reserve on Main Road East.

At home, the only luxuries that were affordable to families' needs were an ice-box, a wireless radio and gramophone, and a primus cooker. In some areas, kerosene lamps were still in use. At one stage, even tobacco was hard to obtain and was rationed. Such was the Spartan life that faced most hopeful migrants back in 1950. But better days lay ahead just around the corner.

Paul and Mary Portelli saw the suburb grow around them. Sadly, just before giving away his youngest daughter in marriage, Paul passed away in September 1962 aged 67 years due to complications of diabetic conditions. His wife survived him by only four years and died at the age of 70 years. For the remaining clan, as for other migrants, St Albans has remained their home and their families would inherit the suburb "that nobody wanted".

The promised land

It was 1949 and the former troopship 'Astorius' ploughed its way through the stormy waves of the Mediterranean, already in its fifth day heading to Port Said. On board, among the many hopefuls of migrants who had just finished the usual supper of corned beef, hash potatoes and eggs, Charlie Cini felt nauseated by the rocking, unstable vessel. Seated next to his brother Joe, he swore that once they'd reached Port Said he was going to jump ship and swim back home to Malta. The passage through the Suez Canal provided relief and the desolate palm-studded sandbanks and the nomadic Arab folk on camelback provided a calming background as the ship started southward and slowly onward. Another two weeks crossing the Indian Ocean provided nothing for entertainment except strolling the decks or seeking solace in someone's company or watching the wash left behind in the ship's wake.

The ship's accommodation arrangements ensured that men and women were segregated because of dormitory style sleeping quarters. The travel ticket only ensured your Spartan-like voyage, a bed and daily meals, but not a cabin. Husbands and wives had to sleep apart and only met up on deck and at mealtimes. Males were off limits to the sections reserved for the female passengers and the ship provided no private accommodation. That was just standard fare all the way. This is what you got for your £70 ticket.

Docking at Fremantle it would take another week before Charlie and Joe would disembark at Port Melbourne and catch a train to the outer suburb of Albion where their uncle had made room for them. Before long, and after a stint at shovelling snow on some now forgotten mountain, Charlie found work at the Spaldings factory in Albion, well known for its manufacture of sporting goods. It was a far cry from working the fields of rural Gozo (Malta's sister island) from dawn till dusk and for very little pay. And so began the saga of a new life thousands of miles away from home.

The Cini family

By 1953 the three eldest Portelli sisters (my aunties) had married and it was through my Mum's brother-in-law that my dad, Charlie Cini, was introduced to my future mother, Tessie Portelli. They met at the old St Albans station when it was still on the northern side of the Main Road junction. (It would be relocated to the southern side in 1959.) After a three-month courtship my parents married in May of 1954 at St Mary's in Sunshine, which was the nearest Catholic church. The Sacred Heart church in St Albans was still under construction although masses were held at the old Mechanics Institute in East Esplanade.

Initially having lived in nearby Albion, dad bought a weatherboard house at (then) 53 Alfrieda Street (currently 113) which belonged to Mr Fred Mullenger. Sadly the old house was torn down in 2013 to accommodate four townhouses. Dad also owned the block adjacent to this house as an investment as land was still an affordable purchase. Uncle Joe had come to Australia with dad in 1951. Joe had his wife and children come over and they lived together with my dad before they moved to Main Road West. Then my uncle Nick and his wife came and lived with my dad. They bought the block next door and built their house there. Then my Uncle Lou came and he stayed with my dad. So they all helped my dad and his brothers.

At the back of the house, dad owned a couple of water storage tanks and sold water to neighbours and passers-by as no water pipeline had yet been laid. Creature comforts included a wireless, an ice-box and an old cast iron stove. Washing days consisted of a galvanized tub and a scrubbing board. An outhouse in the backyard served its purpose as sewerage was still some twenty years away.

Alfrieda Street was a wide, rough and corrugated thoroughfare turning muddy in the wet weather. Downtown Alfrieda Street near Main Road East consisted of a few old cottages behind picket fencing. These would soon be torn down to be replaced with much needed shops. The last of the cottages would be demolished by the mid sixties.

I was born at the Western General Hospital in 1959 and grew up with my brother Tony and my sister Marlene. The three of us attended the Sacred Heart Catholic school in Theodore Street - I was there from 1964 to 1970. I can still remember my first day at school and the kid sitting next to me was Robert Gauci. George Hardiman is another kid I remember from all those kids coming into the classroom on that first day.

I remember the Buttigiegs, and the Farrugias over in Erica Avenue. The Farrugias came just after the Suez Canal crisis – they were what we called the Egyptian-born Maltese because their ancestors were born there, their grandparents, because before Australia most Maltese used to migrate to North Africa in search of work. When Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power there was trouble over the Suez Canal crisis; he declared that all British passport holders, notably Maltese and Cypriots, should be out of the country. He was a socialist nationalist advocating "Egypt for Egyptians". Whether you were sick or pregnant or whatever you were told you had to be out of the country by a particular date. That's where the Red Cross stepped in and helped many people get passage to England initially and then to a country of their choice.

Work hard and fear the Lord

Both my parents were literate to a good degree in English. Mum had the added advantage of having elementary school along with her kin in an English-speaking environment, as the eldest two children attended secondary school in America. Early Hollywood cinema provided extra curricula tuition when they watched the latest releases at the "talkies". Mum spoke with a strong American accent which she never lost and her Maltese was also fluent as this was spoken at home.

Assimilation into this country was an easy transition. The Portellis, especially my mother, lived and breathed the cinema, especially the musicals, her favourite being "The King and I". She'd sing the tunes word for word. Though dad was tone deaf he had a soft spot for country and folk music. He had no ear for Rock 'n' Roll but would later in life come to appreciate early Beatles' songs.

My parents struggled like everybody else. My mum worked as a dressmaker in the city between 1964 and 1971 which is when she had the stroke. She'd catch a red rattler every morning to the city because she worked in A'Beckett Street. I remember me and my sister going with her one summer's day just to see what she did. That was in 1967 and I was about eight years old. I loved going to the city because there was always something to see. It was November 9th, 1971, that mum at age 39 years succumbed to a massive stroke that left her partially paralyzed for life and her voice was also affected. I guess in a sense it was the day her normal life ended. She was no longer capable of holding a job let alone carrying a tune. It was a terrible time for her. We put it at the back of our minds and soldiered on as all kids do, but life would never be the same again.

My father worked at ICI in Deer Park. He watched the instruments and dials to make sure the acids that made the chemicals were being mixed properly and there was no overflow. He worked three shifts. The fumes would have been dangerous and if any acid spilled on you it would have burnt you. We'd go upstairs but have this fear that if you fell in there you'd get burnt alive. This was in Deer Park where Cairnlea is now. It tugs at my heart when I drive through that area because I remember that dad worked there. Initially he pushed a bike in all weather conditions along the roads to Deer Park just to get there. The guard knew this and told him "Charlie, come through the back way where the St Albans pub is. I'll open the gate and you come through there instead or riding all the way up to Deer Park." Because he'd get chased by dogs and the road was rough. So the guard had a bit of heart.

My parents' life centred on work and the newly formed Parish of the Sacred Heart where my Dad made good his loyalty and association with St Albans' first Catholic parish priest, Fr Con Reis who was known as "The Little Digger", having seen service as an army chaplain in the jungles of new Guinea during WWII. After the war he was given charge to form a new parish by the indomitable Archbishop Mannix.

Dad became involved in what was known as St Joseph's Guild, a group of volunteers who gave their free time to the maintenance of the new primary school and running the weekly block collection, i.e. door-knocking parishioners' residences to obtain funds for the running of the church and school. Government funding was non-existent. Jim Shanley, originally from Flemington and then living in Scott Avenue, supervised the weekend working bees and Fred Barnard from Ballarat sacrificed his free time in obtaining materials to build the school. To the men of St Joseph's Guild it was a labour of love. The parish could not have materialized without the dedication of these loyal men and the migrants that gave up their free time and whatever funds they could afford.

Keeper of the flame

The principal reasons a Catholic church and school were established in the heart of St Albans was because of the increasing need to cater for the Catholic migrants moving into the suburb. The humble beginning of the Sacred Heart parish was inaugurated and consecrated in 1953 and became a Mecca for the faithful.

The central figure in the establishment of the parish was the legendary Con Reis. This remarkable man was affectionately known as "The Little Digger" and "Keeper of the Flame" and had many endearing qualities which qualified him to take on the role as pastor and navigator of his ever-increasing flock. He was steadfast, compassionate, patient, understanding and maintained an amicable social interaction with migrants. Aware that many migrants were impervious to the English language, his sermons were worded simply and at a pace migrants were apt to comprehend. He understood the importance of communication but he did not suffer fools gladly. The parish needed funds from its congregation if it were to maintain a school and a church and insensitive foolhardiness butters no-one's bread. Fr Reis was a forthright being but was flexible.

Fr Reis was born in Albury in 1914 and educated at Xavier College in Kew and Corpus

Christi College in Werribee. He was ordained in 1939 at the onset of the Second World War. In 1941 he served as an army chaplain and witnessed men fight and die in the jungles of New Guinea where he dispensed his duties with the wounded and the dying. After the war he was back in Melbourne and in the wake of the migrant intake he was authorized to establish a new parish. With church funds he acquired the Stenson property in Winifred Street for the sum of £16,000.

Frederick Charles Stenson was a Protestant but Fr Reis was never one to discriminate. At Stenson's funeral in 1958, Fr Reis along with the Sisters of St Joseph and school children of Sacred Heart Primary formed a guard of honour to pay their respects at the old Presbyterian Church in Elaine Street. On Stenson's death, the church took over his residence (named Keighlo, originally the home of Alfred Henry Padley) which was in need of restoration. The adjoining property was also purchased and further classrooms were built there.

Father Reis's amicable nature was able to inspire loyalty from his fellow parishioners. His social interactions drew skilled volunteers, many of them from migrant backgrounds to help build the school. These volunteers formed the local St Joseph's Guild. Their other responsibilities included block collections where volunteers door-knocked selected fellow parishioners' homes to ask for donations. My father Charlie and his brother Joe were instrumental in this field as well as helping out on weekends maintaining the school grounds and buildings. The Sisters of St Joseph were always on hand to provide an urn of tea and freshly baked scones served with butter. In acknowledgement of their contributions to the parish, a shrine was dedicated to the volunteers of St Joseph's Guild. It is still there today on the corner of the entrance to the school though the original crucifix was replaced after being vandalized.

As the fifties wore on, more classrooms were added. Local builder Fed Barnard worked hand in hand with Fr Reis to ensure that migrant families' children along with the rest were ensured a good Catholic education well before the days of political correctness forbade the teaching of any religious instruction in mainstream schooling.

The rate at which St Alban was growing gave Fr Reis the necessary foresight to acquire land in neighbouring Sydenham in 1962. Twenty years later that acquisition would become the parish of Emmaus and Catholic Regional College. 1968 saw the building and consecration of St Pauls Church in St Albans East, followed by Holy Eucharist in 1972 near Ginifer Station. St Albans had come a long way in a short 20 years.

I served as an altar boy under Fr Reis and Fr O'Reilly. I found them both to be excellent men with deep morals and good principles.

Fr Reis was in his sixties when he handed his authority to Fr John O'Reilly in 1973 because Fr Reis was appointed parish priest at St Colombo's in Elwood. Fr John O'Reilly was originally from County Wexford in the Republic of Ireland. He migrated here in 1961 and came to St Albans in 1968. Forthright with an indomitable character he ensured that the flame would continue to light into the future of the parish. Under O'Reilly's unwavering guidance and persistent dedication, the parish opened its doors to secondary school enrollment in 1978. The concept of a Federation of Regional Colleges in surrounding suburbs with 3,000 students stands as a legacy to a timeless giant among men whose dictum of "Faith, Hope and Charity" has ensured these virtues have been well put into practice.

After Fr Reis's departure for Elwood he was sorely missed by his St Albans parishioners who came to know him and worked with him. His legacy and influence were immense and no study of St Albans history can ignore his contribution. He gradually became blind and frail in his twilight years and passed peacefully away in 2006. The eastern end of Winifred Street was renamed Reis Street in his honour.

Spare the rod

Sr Clare and Sr Scanlan, Sacred Heart Parish, 1950s.

The Sisters of St Joseph were integral in the development of the Sacred Heart primary school because they provided the administration and the tuition - some were lay teachers while others had earned their diplomas at teachers college. Strict and austere with sixty children to a class under their wing, their ethics and manners were impeccable. Without them the organisation of the school would not have occurred. They were quite strict as it was necessary to maintain order in large classrooms made up mostly of children from a migrant background. The task would not have been easy but they carried out their duties to the letter and for this they deserve

recognition for “duty above and beyond the call of the faith”.

Corporal punishment was the norm throughout all schools back in those conservative days but discipline has served its purpose. The venerable principal of the Sacred Heart primary, Sister Assunta Neeson, was in charge of her convent of Nuns, her dictum being “To err is human, to forgive divine”. If some kid stepped out of line you felt the wrath of the divine come down on you.

Most of the original sisters at the Winifred Street convent were born around the time the Titanic was launched (1911). What we got were mature women who had witnessed the men of their families go off to fight in the First World War. They lived through the Depression and then witnessed their nephews and cousins go off to fight in the Second World War.

They came from all classes of society: from working class suburbs, middleclass establishments, rural settlements and the bush. They were well educated and above all else were Australians – as Australian as meat pies and magpies. Their trademark was a dark brown habit which was always impeccably maintained. In summer they wore white.

Theirs was a Christian crusade to bring up children with a good education and a fear of God drilled into them – with a rosary in one hand and a strap in the other. Misbehavior was expected but not tolerated at any level. Discipline ruled the school. The Catechism they taught, lived and breathed was vital in walking the right path if you were to succeed in life and progress to the hereafter. Theirs was the fight of good over evil and they expected the children in their care be brought up as examples of Christian citizenry. Their lessons have in time proven to be unassailably wise.

Their ethics were of the highest standard which is one reason children of all nationalities were able to assimilate. Fairness and equality were virtues they voiced and put into everyday practice. Though they didn’t voice their opinions publicly in regard to gender issues, my view is that they were firm believers in a woman’s right to recognition and equal treatment. Their founder was Mary McKillop who was canonised as Saint Mary of the Cross and is Australia’s first Catholic saint, and this happened in an age where Victorian values placed women in a subservient role to men. It wouldn’t surprise anyone that the advent of women’s liberation in the late sixties would have been a great welcome. Even the more vocal liberationists like Germaine Greer who was educated through the Catholic system would have received some silent applause. As Brides of Christ, adherent to a strict regimen of duty to the soul and their order, the Sisters of St Joseph were fundamentally women with a cause.

A foot in the door

Dad initially worked at Spaldings in Sunshine (where Bunnings warehouse now stands) after short stints at nearby ARC and the Albion quarry. By 1958 he obtained a higher-paying job at the Albion explosives factory working three shifts at the new RDX plant, which produced explosives for shell and bomb casings. Even though the official war was over, the Cold War with the Soviets had started and ICI ran their production of RDX at Deer Park for the next 30 years. Only British passport holders were eligible to work there, perhaps for security reasons. Along with his brother Mick, they kept an eye out in the mixing control room located upstairs above the kitchen and meals area keeping check that the acid vats did not overflow in the process of making powder for artillery ammunition. Dad’s younger brother Lou arrived here in 1957 and also found work at the ICI complex. Sunshine at Albion was a beehive of industry where work was readily available. A foot in the door guaranteed a job “for life”.

Throughout the course of the opportunistic fifties and sixties, the maternal side of the family had increased. By the time I’d arrived in early 1959, the number had increased to sixteen cousins. Added to this list was my brother Tony (1955) and a younger sister Marlene (1961).

With a good monthly influx of European migration, St Albans had been transformed from a rural backwater to a suburb in its own right with a flourishing population growth that showed no sign of abating. St Albans was the place to be!

Like all migrants, my parents’ endeavour was to improve their living standards and to make life more comfortable. Around 1963 my parents packed up and we moved to lot 9 (now 271) Main Road East just opposite the White Corner shops. Our triple-fronted brick veneer was one of the first erected on the new estate with miles of empty land toward the horizon facing North Sunshine while bungalows and a few weatherboards laced the Keilor side of Main Road. I remember when we moved in there I was laughing saying “where are we?” because I looked out the window and all I could see was paddocks. Within a year everything just mushroomed, which goes to show how quick things develop, especially at that time when there were so many migrants coming in. Later we moved to Mulhall Drive, which was a new area being built in 1972.

Mum had found a job around 1964, catching a “Red Rattler” into the city every morning, working as a seamstress in a clothing sweatshop in A’Beckett Street and always bought home a slab of chocolate, lollies and a dozen cream buns. She was quite capable of making a dress from scratch. Her tool of trade

was an old Singer sewing machine that took pride of place in a nook in the kitchen.

A rabbit in the pot

Commodities were on the rise during the post-war migrant influx though expensive and more durable than our throw-away society has on offer. The adage “You’ve never had it so good” rang true. European Continental foodstuff had become available to consumers and a large variety of everyday groceries were on hand. Self’s Store had become a supermarket and the only one in St Albans at one stage.

The only take-away food premises in St Albans up until 1968 was the Fish 'n' Chips shop inside the Arcade in Main Road East next to the Hounslow property where Woolworths now stands. All orders were wrapped up in newspaper which gave your serve a unique smell and characteristic flavour. Apart from this there was the ubiquitous meat pie and sauce and Cornish pastie sold over milk bar counters. You could also settle for a plain hot dog. A bottle of Tarax soft drink, a Coke, a milkshake, or an ice-cream soda known as a "spider" were the available refreshments. American franchising take-away had yet to reach the western suburbs, so if you wanted a pizza you had to go to Carlton.

About 1968 Gerry Spirados opened the fish and chip shop up on White Corner and everybody was excited about it because it was just across the street - he was our neighbour two houses away. Formerly, the building had been a tyre service centre but had been vacated around 1967. It was then renovated and partitioned to incorporate a fish shop and two billiard salons. Soon enough the premises became a hangout for the suburb's young and restless. My dad wasn’t much into fish and chips but I remember he went there a couple of times and every time I went in there it just smelt divine. That fish and chip shop is still there and that building is still White Corner but it now has a big shark above the entrance that looks like it's been there for years.

Pizzas came along in the seventies and now its kebabs. Pizza shops, McDonalds or KFC were non-existent up until the mid-seventies.

[Portelli sisters and '38 Ford sedan, 1950] [Charles Cini with Phil, Tony, Marlene.

Confirmation Day, 1968.]

The catchphrase “A car in every driveway and a chicken in every pot” did not apply to the newly arrived migrants. In the immediate post-war St Albans, it was more like “A warren in every yard and a rabbit in every pot”. Rabbit became a common staple in many a household. There were heaps of rabbits through the district and even around the ICI plant where dad worked. He used to take us rabitting there on the property and take us inside and show us where he worked. What my father would do was go and get a pair of rabbits while his brother was watching the dials and all that was going on. They had a little cabin down below and whatever rabbits he got he’d cook them up, so they had lunch or dinner together. Even after work he’d get rabbits from there or wheel all the way to Keilor to get a couple of rabbits and have a stew within an hour, because they were pretty adept and skinning them and gutting them and cutting them up ready to go. It saved yourself a quid.

As for a car, it took my Dad thirteen years before he took purchase of a blue and white 1957 FE Holden Special Sedan which cost £300. It was a humble looking vehicle compared to our neighbour’s brand new 1965 X2 Premier Station Wagon, but the ’57 was an addition to the family and it was ours. Dad later updated to a '64 Holden sedan. Uncle Lou bypassed the car ownership difficulties by buying a motorbike.

[Uncle Lou Cini (R) and Cefai brothers, St Albans, c.1957.] [Uncle Lou Cini at Arundel, c.1960.]

Sadly about this time, Granddad Paul Portelli passed away aged 67 in September 1962. Mary Portelli passed away in June 1966. Their contribution to St Albans is that a dozen or so grandchildren and great-grandchildren have made St Albans their home.

Most members of my mum's family, the original Portelli clan, have passed on. It's the same with my dad's family who reside overseas. Their legacy is having left behind three generations numbering nearly a hundred people scattered near and far of whom a fair number reside in St Albans and the western suburbs.

Ring ring goes the bell

School life commenced for me at Sacred Heart primary school in February of 1964, kind of reluctantly. That same week, the Beatles had arrived in America to take on the world, which was still reeling from the aftershock of the Kennedy assassination ten weeks previously but we were too young to fathom world events. Closer to home the carrier HMAS Melbourne had collided with HMAS Voyager in Jarvis Bay killing 80 crew members. The Vietnam War debacle was yet to become a full-scale conflict. The sixties had indeed arrived and we would be caught up in the whirlwind of “happening events”. For the present, our world was the Sound of Music, colour-blocks, Dick and Dora, Choo-Choo bars and the smell of plasticene.

In primary school when we went on class outings it was to Ferntree Gully for Puffing Billy or the zoo. What I particularly liked about primary school was when they had toffee day. On Toffee Day there was a big array of toffees with different colours and different toppings: white ones with sprinkles or yellow ones with sprinkles. We couldn't afford much so we always bought the coffee flavoured ones which were about half a penny. That's about all I ever tasted, but they were toffees and they were good. Choo Choo Bars were also one of my favourite lollies. You would always end up with a black mouth and tongue, so you would stick out your tongue to see who had the blackest. There were also Kangaroo Sticks, the glucose sticks; there were red, orange, and green ones and it would take you a day to suck on them. You had little cocktail lollies with clear wrappers and things like that. A lot of kids wandered into the tuck shop but didn't buy anything because they didn't have any money; they just went window shopping. Mrs O'Brien ran the shop and she would warn everybody "Get out of the shop if you don't want to buy anything."

Throughout the course of our primary school education back in the 1960s was pretty much elementary. From preps through to grade six before the commencement of classes we would assemble in the school ground and stand at attention in line formation for any daily announcement from the school's principal, Sister Assunta Neesom. Monday mornings the flag was raised as we recited "God Save the Queen". Then would follow the daily march around the schoolyard as "Liberty Bell" blared out from an old gramophone.

All schools were supplied with government-funded crates of milk for morning recess which we had to drink. The term lactose intolerant was unknown or unheard of back then and the sight of kids throwing up all over their desks became a common ritual. Vomit and sawdust went hand in hand just like spilled ink and blotting paper and the smell came with a lifetime guarantee.

In seven years we'd progressed from simple color blocks for sums to brain-busting logarithms, from "Dick and Dora" to writing our own essays. I recall a particular episode when we were told to write an essay about our suburb. Mental block would automatically set in. What could you possibly write about the place - empty blocks and bungalows and unpaved streets or the fact that we just happened to live here - what could one possibly write about St Albans? One essay that was read out to the whole class was submitted by Vicky Hermann who apparently had done some pretty hardcore research revealling that the plains surrounding St Albans were once part of an active volcano, hence the existence of hard granite rocks strewn out over and under the terrain. That essay really impressed us!

A number of the parents of those children whose shared my class were longtime residents before the post-war migrant intake. The twins Anthony and Joanne Doherty's father John was the local postman and part-time fire brigade volunteer along with Tom Hewitt whose daughter Mary also shared my class. Chris Farrugia's grandfather migrated from Malta in the early 1920s, being the first Maltese to settle here. Most of my cousins from both sides of the family attended Sacred Heart Primary from its inception: the Azzorpardis, Zammits and Pisanis along with a handful of Cinis. Maltese made up the bulk of the enrollments along with a good number of Italians, then Polish, and a few Germans. Children of Anglo-Celtic origin comprised around one-sixth of school enrollments.

As children we played marbles in primary school, we played British Bulldog, cricket and football in season but I never belonged to a club. It was a simple life. I still remember the Mass being said in Latin. Around 1965 they changed the format. The altar was placed in a more central position and there were other changes. That was by decree of Vatican II. It was a big change for us.

Sacred Heart Church, Winifred Street 1960s

Very rarely was there a Maltese priest in the area. That didn't happen until St Pauls opened up off Station Avenue. That's where my parents lived their last years, at 33 Station Avenue; it was predominantly a Maltese area. They opened the church there in 1968 and the first priest there was Fr Cini, who was no relation. I served as an altar boy under him. Then Fr Gooligan came along and he was given his own Parish of the Holy Eucharist and I was an altar boy under him as well, so I served with several priests. Looking back you see that from one church with all these people coming in the thousands over the years, within 15 years you had Sacred Heart, St Paul's, and Holy Eucharist. That's quite an achievement. They built schools and whatnot. Prior to the war it was a rural settlement with people predominantly of British

stock who were either Anglicans of Protestants, but I don't think they discriminated. They were hard working people who had seen war and deprivation and the Depression, and eking out a living was more important than anything else. And they had it hard too. They probably appreciated the fact that there were migrants coming to St Albans and made St Albans what it is. It brought business to the area.

A lot of Maltese were poor and were not able to pay a lot of fees to the Church. I remember a lot of lunches which were just tomato paste on bread wrapped in newspaper. Sometimes they could not pay the school fees and Fr Reis let it go. He was a compassionate man. The Australians were always looked at as something superior. They kept to themselves even though they would play with us because they were upper crust: "We are Aussies." But they accepted us. We weren't called wogs. God help them if they did, because if the nuns found out they would have come down hard on them. That was the attitude – we all got along well.

By the time we'd made Grade 6 in 1970, we were witness to man landing on the moon, the protracted war in Vietnam as a drag on the psyche, a span of the Westgate bridge had collapsed killing 36 men, and the Beatles closed off the decade by going their separate ways. And so too was it with most of my primary school classmates. We'd lived the innocence of youth through seven years together. We would not come together again until 1991 when I and a fellow former classmate Mary Hewitt would organise a class reunion. (I think her father was a councilor.) I rang her and she was really interested in getting people together. It turned out that she called half the class and I called the other half and word passed along and we had this reunion over in the Sunshine pub in Glengala Road. It was miraculous because 98% of them rocked up. Dr O'Brien's daughter, Kitty O'Brien, was in my class. She had been living in America and came over for the reunion. We all got together and it was one of the most memorable occasions in our lives.

Uncertain seventies

The transition from primary school to junior high school was pretty smooth. My first year at St Albans High School was in 1971 and it was a new experience just as it was for countless others. We sought solace from our insecurities by searching out for former classmates or people with whom we were acquainted. Most of the students were of either Anglo-Celtic or European stock - Asian and African migration was still restricted although people from the Indian sub-continent with tertiary degrees were accepted; Miss Fletcher who taught English at the high school was one example. Misters Azer and Hafez, who taught maths and science respectively, were both Egyptians. Mrs Sacco, who was widowed at a young age and taught maths and French, was Maltese. Mr Naish taught woodwork, having come from England at an early age and taking his apprenticeship at General Motors as a patternmaker.

It was the first time we'd come across so many different faces, having a different teacher for every subject and moving from class to class: Miss Moore (English), Mr Graham (Maths), Mrs Hare (Science) and a host of others comes to mind. One cannot forget the venerable Mr Wilkinson, the school's principal. Once at assembly he spoke of our individuality as a unique asset and that our uniqueness had so much to contribute to our future as a society. It made one feel important. It also said a lot about his vision of the high school and his role as a good humanitarian.

Mr Fantl was our art teacher. Under his guidance we progressed from pastels to perspective and from crayons to Cubism - pretty mind blowing stuff stuff if you appreciated art. Maths was never my strongest subject but it wasn't far removed from what I'd learnt or didn't learn in grade 6. In languages we had a choice - either French or German - and for reasons beyond my grasp I chose French. Woodwork and Metalshop were new to us boys. As for the girls, they had Home Economics. It was all pretty standard fare really. We were on the threshold of puberty and what began to emerge was our growing attraction for the opposite sex but as yet that was uncharted territory and we were too shy to make any headway. Looking back I can only say that these were the best days of our lives though we were unaware of it.

In 1972 we went to Olympic Park for sports. It was the most boring day of my life because I'm not interested in sport and there was nothing to drink, no water tap around. My friend bought a can of Coke and the next thing there were 20 blokes surrounding him asking for a sip like we were in the middle of a desert. That was the only excursion we went to when I was there.

Some of the students who shared my high school classes were former primary school classmates – people I'd grown up with but in an impersonal way: Vicky Hermann who is now a school teacher, Rita Ellul who also went onto a tertiary education earning herself a doctorate. Christine Utri is another classmate of note; she also went on to tertiary education and today is the principal of Catholic Regional College at St. Albans. Kitty O'Brien was another classmate who's father was Dr. Patrick O'Brien who'd seen service in Malta as an R.A.F. Spitfire fighter pilot during the war. Kitty's mother Josephine O'Brien was also a doctor but I'm not sure if she practiced here or supported her husband's practice in some other way. Other classmates

were Rosanna D'Agata, Mary Drago, and Paul Micallef whose father ran St Albans Nursery and Mini Mix down on Errington Road. The newer faces are still crystal clear: Alex Christodoulou, Bill Marganis, Jean Cameron (daughter of Lorna), Elizabeth John with a mane of red hair, Marion Inglis, Judy Watts from Deer Park and the rest who remain persistent in memory. Where are they now?

Gough Whitlam was elected in 1972 and he promised radical change. I still remember the "It's Time" jingles. I remember when the HQ Holden came out when General Motors thought they'd saved the world. They made such a big deal about the new model of cars. I remember the mini skirts – all girls wore mini skirts at high school. The fashions, the music. I remember when the Beatles broke up and you sensed there was change in the air, that an era had ended. With the advent of the seventies, so much had changed in society. The values of the fifties' conservatism gradually made way for an air of liberalism where 1972 would usher in a new wave of political thinking and reform made possible by the new Labor Government of Gough Whitlam. For better or worse Australia would change forever.

In 1973 we went to Malta and I finished my education there up to Form 4. I wasn't very interested in school and just wanted to come back, which I did in 1977.

No place like home

Tony and Phil Cini, 1970s

I commenced my adult working life as my forebears did, having come back to Australia in late 1977 and like them I was able to appreciate how fortunate it is to call Australia home whether in good times or in bad. I was back in my home town and found St Albans to be pretty much the same as when I left it five years previously. I left barely a teenager and came back on the threshold of adulthood. Yet as I went about rediscovering the old haunts there were signs that changes had taken place. The south-east of the suburb had made some progress stretching out from Novarra Parade there were still lots of empty paddocks beyond that were yet to be developed. Where Furlong Road east of the junction was a mere dirt track, a bare concrete skeleton of what was to become Western Hospital stood abandoned around a desolate rocky outcrop. At this stage the hospital's development was put on hold due to lack of federal funding. After all, these were economic hard times because of a recession.

To the west beyond Station Road, Albanvale and Kings Park became suburbs in their own right though yet to reach their full potential of development. There was still empty land heading towards Kororoit Creek.

At the heart of St Albans, two derelict railway houses at the Main Road junction still stood as relics of a by-gone era but were a year away from demolition having seen their last days as a youth community hangout for the growing unemployed. All the roads around the established areas had been sealed. Modern brick veneers outnumbered the weatherboards and the bungalows that dotted the memories of childhood. We were part of the affluent generation and the legacy our forebears had worked so hard for was paying off. We'd inherited suburbia.

In the subsequent decades St Albans has expanded to its furthest boundaries as newer suburbs have mushroomed in all directions. Demand has remained ever so strong and as the generation of first wave migrants have passed on, their children have moved up and onwards where latter day migrants from Asia and Horn of Africa are steadily filling their places. St Albans has shifted from the Continental European culture and become an exotic Asian cultural experience much evident in Alfrieda Street. It's in the heart of modern day St Albans but no longer the centre of people's day-to-day business when you consider we now have major undercover shopping centres on the outer fringes of the suburb. This is part of the reason why St Albans is still unique. As always it has offered convenience of location and value for money as it did when our forefathers came and started out. Though the days of cheap affordable house and land purchase and the local job structure are gone for ever, the newer and practical reasons have taken precedence. Many old structures have been torn down and replaced with multiple units. My parents' original weatherboard dwelling in Alfrieda Street was torn down in 2014 and several townhouses have taken its place. It saddened me to see a part of history demolished but the reality is that it is the direction the future has taken and you can't stand in the way of progress especially when big business is involved in property development and building people's aspiration of progress.

Adaptation to change and resilience is a humanistic virtue. Much has changed since those first wave migrants settled in St Albans. They left their mark not only on a suburb but a country just as this country enriched their lives. Other ethnic groups have followed suit throughout the passage of time and found acceptance. The old walls of prejudice through ignorance have come down making access to much needed diversity. It is what makes the world go round – and it was diversity and acceptance that helped create a special place like St Albans.

Back to the future

"A dragon lives forever / but not so little boys" are the famous lines from Puff the Magic Dragon and imply a million and one tales once we'd left school, moving onward and upward into the world to which we would ultimately contribute and shape.

Though always endeavouring to make that extra bit of money I never made my premises of work a home away from home, and having worked at various occupations I never strayed far from the western suburbs. There were times I'd look back where I'd wished I had furthered my education and earned a career or a trade when I was still young. But with a family to support and a steady income I could never foresee how the climate of business would change in this country. I also didn't expect that with the passing of the years how much the physical body and mental attitude can change. My reasoning was that whether you worked in an office or on the shop floor didn't make you a better person. Good intention of heart really matters because it lubricates social interaction, making the world a happier place.

I've witnessed Sunshine decline as a hub of industry where the suburb of Derrimut now holds that title, employing newer generations far removed from that of my forebears. St Albans has long been fully established – its outer fringes expanding to the reaches of other shires and more than ever with much to offer.

As for family and friends, those that contributed to the making of a unique suburb, the many who have come and the many who have moved on to eternity and legend, I give them the credit for the making of St Albans. Therefore I conclude, drawing inspiration from Alfred Tennyson's poem, The Brook: "Men may come, and men may go – but I go on forever …"

This is the destiny of our chosen suburb – the story of my St Albans – a place so many have called home.

Phil Cini, February 2016

Robert Clark: Student 1969-1970, Member Of Parliament 1988-2016

Robert Clark has been a Member of the Victorian Parliament since 1988, initially representing the electorate of Balwyn before it was abolished in a redivision of boundaries. Since 1992 he has been the sitting Member for Box Hill. In 2009 he was the Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for Finance in the Victorian Opposition. Robert Clark is married with 2 children, and lives in Surrey Hills.

When did your parents come to St Albans?

I think they bought a block of land in 1948 in Beaver Street. As with so many of the streets in St Albans at the time, it was unmade and flooded in winter. I remember wading out in the street in my gumboots and it was great fun as a boy, but probably not that much fun for the grown ups.

Again, as with so many other families, my folks built their place one room at a time. I think by the time I arrived they were just finishing off the second bedroom and finished if off on my arrival.

It was a weatherboard house and access to building materials was very tight because of the war. I gather many families would have found that to be a major problem. I know that my dad was enormously proud that he was able to source some genuine terra cotta roofing tiles; they were scarce as hen's teeth in those days.

They bought the property in 1948 and then travelled to England in 1952; I think they were gone for 6 or 9 months. I was born in 1957.

What was their reason for coming to St Albans?

Probably cheap land, to be honest. At that time Mum was living in Altona. Mum's family had migrated when she was a young girl, I think when she was about five. They lived in various places but settled in Altona. Dad was posted with the RAF and was posted to India and came via Australia. He met Mum at a dance in Melbourne and they got together and lived happily ever after. He was demobbed back to Melbourne after the war. They lived at Mum's parent's place for a while before moving out to St Albans, which is not too far from Altona, of course, on the same side of town and accessible by public transport.

They were like so many others who were determined to make a new life after the war; people from an enormous range of backgrounds. Certainly my impressions as a youngster was that everybody was determined to pitch in

together to establish a new life and put the horror of war behind them.

What was your dad doing post-war in terms of work?

He did a mixture of things. He'd been an aircraft mechanic in the air force. After he was demobbed he worked in my mother's father's business as a professional photographer for a while, but he then went back to being an aircraft mechanic. I think he worked at the government aircraft factory at Laverton or Point Cook. Then he transferred to TAA and worked at Essendon for many years. Later he moved to the maintenance base at Tullamarine when that opened.

Yes, aircraft mechanics would have been in demand at the time. It was a growing industry.

It was, both for Reg Ansett and the government airline. Both of them were fierce competitors and had a very strong loyal workforce - that was my impression. I well remember the children's Christmas parties that we used to have out in the hangers at Essendon, and occasionally we'd get a look inside some of the aeroplanes and climb on the wings, have a wander inside, something like that.

What are your early memories of St Albans?

I remember Errington Reserve, the gates there, the big double gates and the side gates. When I was a bit older I would climb up on the stone shoulderwork and I was so proud I could stand on the top of that. They had a slide and swings inside and I remember getting a mighty whack from the flying swings. Once you've been whacked by that you remember it.

One of my early memories was of the kindergarten. I went to the Church of England kindergarten, that was the Martha Arms kindergarten. The great fun and biggest thrill was when we were allowed out to play on the tricycles. Unfortunately I was one of the slower runners, so I usually ended up with an inferior tricycle, but it was all good fun and terrific.

We've become very used to driving around these days, but growing up it was mainly walking everywhere. We were in Beaver Street, south of St Albans High School, across from Percy Street. Every day that I had kinder Mum used to walk me down to kinder, with my sister in a pusher. Kinder was about an hour and half or something like that, so Mum would come home and later would come back and collect me.

I remember when I was a bit older walking to Sunday school at the Church and walking back alone through the back roads then. There's a laneway behind Alfrieda Street that ran parallel to Alfrieda; there was a grocery store there on the corner. It retrospect it's interesting how safe we were walking around the streets. I would have been about ten through about twelve I suppose, maybe younger in the days at the Sunday school. We'd walk there as a bunch of kids and walk back again and the parents wouldn't think twice about it. These days you don't let the kids out of your sight.

People talked a lot about how safe St Albans was. I suppose now you would have to be a bit cautious.

In Beaver Street for a long time we were near open paddocks and then the new estate came along and we had that development along both sides of Stradbroke Drive. That was a great blow to me because I used to go mushrooming through there. I would hop over the back fence and come back with a load of mushrooms at the right time of year. Also when I was a very young boy there was a grass fire that was threatening our house and mum got me with the sister-in-law standing on the front porch with instructions to take the pusher out onto the street if things got too bad. Mum was out in the garden spraying the back fence with the hose until the fire brigade came along. You'd often get grass fires around the area and have the fire brigade buzzing around.

I remember there being two different fire trucks, which always fascinated me. There was the CFA type with the ladder across its back, and then there was the high one with the sculpted sides with the water tank. I think one was an American style truck and the other one was English. There was a time when one of the trains in the siding was set on fire. That was a big commotion. Dad and a number of other guys went over to help before the fire brigade arrived. That would have been in the late 'sixties or early 'seventies.

I moved out of home in about 1976 or 1977. To me the real psychological change came in the early 'seventies, when there was a huge increase in the crime rate. Probably in retrospect it was still relatively low, but it was a shock at the time. I remember coming home from scouts in Percy Street and going to Beaver Street feeling a bit unsafe walking home at the end of the night; it was probably only 9 o'clock or so.

I suppose that's the 'sixties or early 'seventies when there was that change, but up till then you were perfectly safe. Mum would send me down to do some of the shopping, or would send me off to get my hair cut in the barber in the arcade off Main Road East. We would be sent there on our own … I'm struggling to think how old I would have been: 7 or 8 perhaps. The barber would charge either two bob or two and six. We'd all sit there as kids and he would put us up in his barber's chair and snip, snip, snip, snip.

The other thing about that arcade was the fish and chip shop. I remember that well. For two bob you could get an enormous bag of chips and potato cakes that was wrapped in waxed paper and then in newspaper. It would be totally illegal these days, but it was good recycling then.

As a real treat we would often buy fish and chips when we'd been out for the day visiting my grandparents in Altona on the train. At 7 or 8 o'clock we'd stop to buy fish and chips on the way home.

The other character I remember in the arcade was the butcher. I used to go there regularly to buy offal, which we cooked up to feed our dogs. I'm struggling to remember the name, but I remember the face. He was an enormously genial and cheery butcher. Do you remember?

No. Grinhams was one of the early butchers, but I think they were on the other side. They were one of the long-established ones, I think.

Gilbertsons was there later on.

Yes, but then there were a number of little butchers-cum-delicatessens started in the 'sixties by the Europeans: Slavic people, German people. These days the small butchers are just not around any more.

The first butcher that I went to was for the offal. We almost only bought the offal there, because he was a continental butcher as I recall and had a range of cuts. Mum would get the more traditional Anglo-Saxon cuts at Gilbertsons.

Did you go the St Albans Primary?

I went to the St Albans East Primary. I started when I was four as I was born in March, so I would have started in 1961 or 1962 I suppose. The things I remember about the school are the egg drives. We'd bring along an egg or two as a donation for one of the hospitals. I thought that they were going off to hospitals. I presume they used them in their research but whether they actually cooked and served them I don't know. I've often thought how relative values change, because eggs were about sixpence each at the time, I think.

From St Albans East I went to St Albans Heights when that opened up. I think I was in the inaugural intake there. I think I was there for Grade 6, because I finished Grade 5 with Mr Sharkey at St Albans East. After the year at St Albans Heights I went to St Albans High School and I was there for two years, in 1969 and 1970. Then I sat the entrance exam for University High and was accepted for that, and I commuted there for the next few years.

How did you find the difference between St Albans High and University High?

At the time the main difference was the disciplined character of the school. When I started at Uni High I think most of the teachers still wore academic gowns and I think the Principal wore his mortar board at assemblies. That all changed very quickly. My first year at Uni High was the last of the traditional years. I think the Principal changed and the new Principal was more laid back. In retrospect, it's probably fair to say that the academic standards were higher, but I still think I had a terrific bunch of teachers at St Albans High and I feel guilty that I can't remember more of their names. Mr Nash was the woodwork teacher. He was a fantastic fellow, a stamp collector, as I was. Mr Shaw was there as one of the senior teachers. Mrs Sturesteps taught German and was given an incredibly hard time by some of the students. Mt Hafez was a maths teacher of Egyptian background. Mr McInerny was the Principal, though I think he was there for only one year.

The High School, of course, has changed a lot. When I was there in Form 1 we were in a portable, which was where the library building is now located. We didn't have the assembly hall at that time, we held assemblies out in the open. I remember Mr McInnery giving us a very long harangue at one stage and I felt very wobbly at the knees for trying to stand still for so long.

The science teacher was a very enthusiastic fellow. He organized a team of boys to compete on "Its Academic". I was very disappointed because he made the selection from the Form 4 boys, and I was in Form 2 then. I thought it was a bit unfair that we weren't given the opportunity to participate. They were a good bunch of teachers. There was an English teacher - Mrs Wilkinson? – who encouraged me to sit the entrance exam for Uni High. It was a great spirit at the school, with very dedicated teachers. If you look back you realize how good and dedicated they were.

At University High my initial passion was Latin, which I did from Form 3, because the subject wasn't available at St Albans. I really loved that. Later on I became interested in legal studies and economics, which probably shaped my studies when I went to university.

I went to Melbourne University in 1975 and finished full-time in 1981, but then continued my studies there part-time. So I ended up with Commerce (Hons) degree in 1980, a Law degree in 1982, and an Arts degree in 1986.

Is this when you became interested in politics?

My family had always been interested in politics. It was a common topic of conversation at home. I think if Mum had had better opportunities, which she didn't have in the Depression, she might very well have become involved in politics and current affairs herself. That gave me an interest in political issues

because we'd talk about them over the dinner table. As I went through Uni High it was a time of political upheaval in Australia with the Whitlam era, and the failure of the Whitlam era was in 1975, which was my first year in university. Even though my family did not have a Liberal background by any means, I joined the Melbourne University Liberal Club and the Australian Liberal Students Federation when I went to university. I joined the Liberal Party in 1976.

Were there any particular leaders or groups that influenced you in that direction?

I think it was my exposure to economics, which was very strongly committed to the notion that you could have a decentralized system whereby people acting of their own initiative and exercise in control of their own lives could lead to a mutual and beneficial outcome through the economic system, that really impressed me. That was through my study of economics. From that my general support for individual freedom improved on that. Probably also the excesses and failures of the Whitlam era and how it was disastrous for the nation in particular.

When at university I became active in student politics. I held office in the Students Representative Council and was involved in a court case against the University, the Students Representative Council, and the Australian Union of Students. I was Treasurer of the SRC in 1976-77 and I thought that some of the money was being misspent, and people wouldn't listen to me saying "Hey, you can't do this." In the end I brought a court case against all three bodies, on the basis that the University was illegally raising compulsory student fees and was improperly handing them over to the SRC knowing they were going to be misspent, and then challenging some of the spending by the SRC and Australian Union of Students. Three of those claims were upheld in the Supreme Court. The judge held that the university was illegally collecting fees, and that the SRC and AUS were misspending some of their funds. The success of the court case resulted in changes to the law relating to student unionism in Victoria.

How old were you at this stage?

That was in 1977, so I was twenty. I was legally a minor then, because the legal age of majority was twenty-one. The fellow who became in legal terms my next friend had just turned twenty-one. He in effect was able to guarantee or take responsibility for my actions, so he was the one who had his neck on the line if I'd lost. At the time it was the thing to do, because it was my responsibility and these people were misspending the money and it was improper and shouldn't have happened.

Were you seen as a bit of a radical, taking up these public issues?

I suppose yes, but not in usual sense of the term radical, because radical is usually considered coming from the left of politics, which is on the other side of the spectrum.

I suppose for me radical means slightly unusual, because a lot of students, in my impression, would be happy to get on with their studies and leave that other stuff to someone else. It generally took a fair bit of courage to go out of the ordinary way and take up a public issue. It must have been a very good grounding to become further involved.

Yes. The risk with student politics for those who get involved in it is that they can end up neglecting their studies suffering from that, but on the other hand you get a grounding in the broader world that's probably invaluable. I suspect the fact I had been involved in that court case and done a few things out of the ordinary led me then to get articles with quite a good law firm, and I progressed from there. As a solicitor I was practicing in commercial, financial and labour law. Maybe if I had stuck with standard studies that wouldn't have happened. Who knows? But I ended up with a firm that looked after me very well and tolerated my ongoing political enthusiasm, and put up with me being a candidate unsuccessfully for parliament in 1985 and then put up with me being a successful candidate and leaving the firm in 1988.

I became more active in politics during the 'eighties. I was President of the Forest Hill Young Liberals from 1986 to 1987, an executive member of the Victorian Young Liberal Movement in 1986, and Vice-Chairman of the Deakin Electorate Committee from 1986 to 1988. I was a member of the Liberal Party's Constitutional Committee since 1987.

When you were at University High, were you travelling from St Albans?

Yes. I would cycle to the station, leave the bike against the railing, and hop on the train. I still remember the long wait at the railway crossing on occasions while the gates were shut waiting for a train to cross.

I left St Albans in my second year at university when I went to live in one of the university colleges. Initially, I'd lived at home and commuted by train because I didn't have a car. I got a drivers licence in my first year at university and moved into college after that, and subsequently into various shared houses around the area with my university friends.

After I left university and met and married my wife we settled in Parkville. When I was running for parliament we bought a place in the electorate of Surrey Hills and moved there. I was elected to parliament in 1988.

At that stage, you'd obviously had a career in law and you also had political interests. Was

there a particular episode that made you think: "I'm going to stand for parliament," or did that evolve over a period of time?

I think it had been an aspiration, or at least a serious possibility, from some time during my high school stage, but don't ask me when. I think that midway through the time at University High I had in mind some sort of career in the public service, equally considering a possibility as a public servant in something like treasury policy. But I think by the time I got to university I had in mind that if things turned out I would be interested in running for parliament. Things turned out very fortunate for me. In 1985 I was unsuccessful for a seat called Waverley Province, which included Mt Waverley, Glen Waverley, and the Clayton area. Then I was chosen by the Liberal Party as their candidate for Balwyn in the 1988 elections, and I was elected then. That's nearly twenty years ago.

How have you found that time?

It has passed quickly. I suppose it falls into three distinct periods. In my first term we were in opposition. It was timed politically with the Victorian Development Corporation scandal with Pyramid and the Tri Continental Corporation, the collapse of the State Bank and the National Safety Council. It was a pretty rough time. The bottom fell out of everything. It think it was about the time of the recession we had to have: early 'nineties. From a Liberal Party point of view we were developing policies in the hope of being elected. That was the first era.

The second phase began when we went into government in 1992 and I was Alan Stockdale's parliamentary secretary. For me, having been a commercial lawyer, I was thrown into investigating corporate scandals and related problems. So my legal skills were put immediately to good use when I went into parliament. I was very fortunate to become Chairman on Alan Stockdale's backbench committee and over time worked very closely with him.

The third phase was later on from 1999 when we were back in opposition again.

They were pretty amazing times. There was still the threat of collapse of financial institutions and it was a very difficult budgetary period. Our second term was not so much reacting and responding to the crises at the times but more ongoing concerns. Clearly, the energy was in industry restructuring, transport, local government. A range of budgetary reforms that aren't particularly front of mind but are better accounting reforms and measures of what governments do.

So your interest in economics has been part of the work you've been doing for a number of years.

Absolutely. I'm interested in the interaction of economics, social policy and the law. It's the management of government, how to run government well. A lot of that involves money, but a large part of it is how governments provide services. Money is simply a means of paying for the services that government needs to provide, so it's as much about how you deliver services as how you budget for it. The two are integrated. What you want is a government that delivers the right services and delivers them well. I think there has been a lot that's been neglected in measuring what governments actually do rather that just what they say. That's one of the issues I've been arguing for strongly, particularly over recent years.

I am Shadow Treasurer at the moment.

Can you see yourself continuing in that role? Would you like to be the treasurer in government?

Absolutely. There is so much better that we can do than we are at present. It would be great to have the opportunity to do it. That's up to the electorate, but we shall see. Times will change. The electorates these days are a lot more volatile than they used to be. People are more prepared to switch their votes. Governments are thrown in and thrown out. It is interesting to ask yourself what determines the voting patterns across suburbs. I think a lot of it is tradition, particularly in the northern and western suburbs that are Labor suburbs: we vote Labor and return Labor members. I haven't looked at the voting patterns for a while, but I recall maybe twenty years ago you'd have about 30% of the vote would be Liberal. Rex Webb was a shoe shop proprietor in Main Road West who was the Liberal candidate for at least one year. That was pretty gutsy when 70% of the area was voting Labor. Rex was very hard working at the local government level.

Were you aware of politics in St Albans at the time?

Oh, yes. You asked how I became interested in politics. Every time there was an election I'd be keenly interested as an ankle biter as to what was going on. I remember grabbing all the "how to vote" cards from the folks and taking them home and asking all sorts of questions about the preferential system, which my parents struggled to answer. I remember Jack Ginifer, indirectly. He would come along to the scouts and open events. Later on when I was a mid-to-late teenager there was Jim Cairns. I remember doing a foolish thing in going along to one of his street corner rallies wearing a Liberal Party badge. Most people were very civilized about it, but I remember getting into a blazing row with some fellow who got very worked up about me being a Liberal. I remember Jim Cairns had a very big rally in the public hall section of the Maternal and Child Health Centre

near Selfs. That was a big rally, so it must have been when he was a minister in the Whitlam government. He ceased to be treasurer due to some scandalous circumstances. That was probably my awareness at the time.

Coming back to your original question, I think one of the things that will make a change to the political dynamics is the new system of elections for Upper House seats, because it will mean there will be five MPs elected by proportional representation across the suburbs. That means there will be more of a mixture of representation.

Will that mean some of the smaller parties might get in?

It's possible. To get elected people need to get about 16% of the vote, either directly or by accruing preferences from other people. Probably the Greens will be the only ones of the smaller groups who have a realistic chance, unless there was an absolutely stand out independent, but they would have to be very well known as an individual because of the size of the seats. Realistically it will be Greens, Liberal, or Labor.

Do you think that the change is overall a good change or not?

The fairer thing about proportional representation is for the state Upper House to be elected as one electorate as they have in New South Wales, because that would allow the widest possible range of representation. The current system has been put together pretty carefully by the government to minimize the prospects of minor parties getting in. To me, the biggest regret of the change is now the Upper House MPs all go off at the one time, so you lose the continuity that was in the previous system where half would go each time. Also there is no capacity under the new laws for the opposition party to have control of the Upper House. So it will either be government control of the Upper House or minor parties with the balance of power, and that's going to lead to less stable results and less opportunity for either strong government or, if the electorate doesn't have full confidence in one government, then both parties need to have agreement for major legislation to go through. There may well be theoretical deficiencies but I thinks it's worked out well in practice. So I think it's not a good thing, but there are two silver linings. One is that areas like the western suburbs will have MPs from more than one party. The second silver lining is that there is now a fixed date for every election. That had bipartisan support.

Thinking back to St Albans, especially as your career has taken you out of the area, are your family still in St Albans or did they move as well?

They lived in St Albans until after Dad retired. Then they moved to Ringwood. Like many other parents they pitched in to help where they could. My father was involved with the scout movement, and involved with the project to build their brick building on Errington Reserve. When I was involved with the cubs we would meet in the little military type Nissan hut. My mother was involved in the mothers club at St Albans East and I think at St Albans Heights as well.

Did you continue any connections with St Albans, or did that stop once your family moved away?

Probably once Mum and Dad moved I didn't have any immediate connection left. For example, my friends from school days have moved. The closest I've back to St Albans is through my dentist in Sunshine, who has looked after me and the family very well.

But I do get occasional opportunities to visit the area. I was really delighted to be invited to the "back to school day" at St Albans Heights and the reunion at St Albans High. Previously I was invited to the 40th anniversary celebration at St Albans High. The Principal at that time got Alex Adrianopoulos and I to officiate in unveiling the plaque for the 40th anniversary. That was before the hall was renovated.

I was really impressed by my return to St Albans Heights a couple of years ago. I reckon the kids were better behaved on that occasion than we were in my days there. They were so enthusiastic and the Principal and the teachers were so keen. They took me round to just about every classroom, so I sang songs with the preps and watched the third graders putting together Powerpoint presentations. Some of the senior students pretended to be journalist and media people - they held a media conference and asked me all sorts of questions. We even did the traditional planting of a couple of trees. It was great. The school looked terrific and the kids were incredibly well behaved. They ran a very good school program. I was so delighted to see the school going so well.

Robert Clark, Parliament House, 2006.

2014 Update: Robert Clark is still the Member for Box Hill in the Victorian Parliament. He is also the Attorney-General, Minister for Finance and Minister for Industrial Relations.

Left - Robert Clark on the cover of the Law Institute Journal.

Interviewed in 2006 at Parliament House, Melbourne.

Yvonne Correlje: Educator, Human Resources Manager, Artist

My family came to Australia from Rotterdam in Holland, but the family origins on my father's side are from France in the time of the religious wars that followed the French revolution. They were Huguenots who migrated to Holland because at that time Holland offered religious freedom. About the same time, John Locke, that leading English philosopher and political theorist, also went to Holland for the freedom and lived there for a while. The Dutch were quite progressive socially.

The family of my paternal grandmother were German and quite well to do. They were definitely part of the middle class socio-economic strata in Holland. My father had an uncle who went to Indonesia with the East India Company so the family had second cousins who grew up in Java, as they called it then. My mother was of Dutch origin but born in the US. Her parents migrated there because her father used to work as a steward on a ship for the Netherlands-America Line. It was in the early 'twenties and there was a lot of emigration to America as the promised land. My grandmother didn't want my grandfather travelling on the ship because she thought sea travel was dangerous. They then moved to Hoboken, New Jersey, where my mother was born in 1923. When the Titanic went down my grandmother feared that something might happen to my grandfather so she convinced him to quit the job as a steward. Ironically, he started working on the wharves, because that's all he could do, and he was killed in an accident on the wharves. Life's full of irony.

My grandmother did come into some money in compensation for his death because the shipping line was owned by Rockefeller, and that money was invested for my mother. My grandmother and mother went back to Holland when my mother was about three. However, my grandmother was still young and vulnerable, and everyone was her friend and everyone was in need, especially in the 1920s when things were getting tight and the Depression was approaching. She married a widower with two children and that money helped keep the family going.

My parents, Anton and Hendrina Catharina Correlje, married in 1947 after the Second World War. Holland had been occupied twice, so after the war my parents felt there would be more opportunities in another country. They considered America, because of my mother having been born there it would have made it easier for them. They also thought of South America and Australia. The family came to Australia in December 1954. We had connections here and these people lived in St Albans. They organised accommodation for us because the word was around that hostel accommodation left a lot to be desired.

Coming to Australia

Correlje family, 1950s

We were fortunate in Holland. We had a flat - because in the cities people lived in flats - and we also had a holiday house, which we shared with my grandparents. There was a limit as to how much money my parents could take out of the country, so a lot of possessions they had were sold or given away. When they came to St Albans it seemed as if they had arrived at the last frontier. We weren't used to going to the toilet in a dunny out the back.

The attitude towards migrants at the time was that we had to be so thankful that we had come to the land of milk and honey, but we were used to a much more sophisticated lifestyle in Europe. Even though we'd suffered war, we weren't deprived. Being here really was like being at the last frontier, and it was so hot and dry.

It took six weeks on a ship to get here. I will always remember our first contact with Australia because my birthday coincided with the ship docking in Fremantle. We left Holland in middle to late October and arrived here in summer, and the summers in the 'fifties were hot. Maybe we felt it was hot because in St Albans there weren't many trees and there weren't many gardens, there was no air conditioning, and there was no insulation. We were baking on the western plains.

I remember the ship leaving Rotterdam and the family crying. It was winter and I remember waving to the family standing on the wharf as the ship pulled away from the pier. I remember the very strict quarantine conditions. When we left, all our clothes had to be fumigated and our shoes as well as a precaution against bringing in rabies or certain other diseases. When we actually got on board the ship my father lifted me up and they even sprayed the

bottom of my shoes. We went through the English Channel along the coast down past the Straights of Gibraltar and I remember seeing the Rock of Gibraltar. We went through the Mediterranean Sea and the Suez Cannel. I can remember that trip vividly, even seeing Arabs on camels on the shores of the Suez Cannel. We went to Aden and Port Said. I can't remember whether it was Aden or Port Said where they sold water in bottles to us, which is not unusual in this day and age but at that time, for me, the only thing that came in bottles was lemonade. The water on the ship was undrinkable – it was really horrible so you had to have the bottled water. My brother and I, and another boy from the ship went ashore to walk through the streets and have a look at a mosque. We couldn't get onto the shore directly but these little boats would come out and ferry you across.

The ship then crossed the Indian Ocean where I saw flying fish for the first time. We experienced a storm which was so severe we couldn't eat in the dining room and weren't allowed on deck because the waves were washing overboard, and this was a big ship. In the dining room all the tables and chairs had to be tied together because as the ship lurched and pitched from side to side all the tables and chairs would just slide across the floor. All meals were served in the cabins while the storm lasted. When we crossed the equator they had all these celebrations which I found to be scary, because they all got dressed up in fancy costumes and I found the King Neptune costume to be very scary, he looked as if he had emerged from the depths of the ocean. We stopped at Fremantle on my birthday; I had turned seven. From there we went to Adelaide and then Melbourne, where many passengers disembarked but many went on to Sydney.

Coming to St Albans

We arrived in Melbourne in 1954 on Friday 5 December, the day on which the Dutch celebrate St Nicholas Day. We don't celebrate Christmas with gifts, we celebrate St Nicholas Day. Christmas is dinner with the family. On Monday I went to the old primary school in West Esplanade. It was horrendous because I didn't speak any English. I had gone to school only for a couple of months in Holland. My brother and I had gone to a Montessori kindergarten in Holland, this was very progressive and my mother initiated this. Therefore for us to go to kindergarten on the boat seemed to me a backward step, besides the kindergarten on the boat was run like a little prison, I told my brother this so we escaped.

In Holland school started in August or September, but I broke my collarbone and that interrupted my education and consequently I didn't have much of an introduction to schooling there. When we arrived in St Albans I think my mother had had enough of me with six weeks on the ship and having to cope with three little children, so she was happy for me to go to school immediately even though the school year was virtually over.

St Albans Primary School

So it was off to school on Monday to the St Albans Primary School. I had this little girl appointed to sit next to me and help me with the assimilation process, but because she couldn't sit with her friend she refused to talk to me. I spent a very unhappy two weeks at school before the end of year break up. I had no idea what was going on because in Holland we had a long lunch hour when everyone would go home for lunch. Here we had all these bells and I didn't know what they were for, so it was just miserable and I didn't learn much English.

Then during the school holidays all it took me was six weeks and I knew the language.

My brother Anton is 13 months younger than I, but the two weeks of school that I had experienced weren't enough to put me up into grade 2 so consequently in 1955 we ended up in the same class. We went to the old hall in East Esplanade because with the influx of migrants they didn't have sufficient space at the old school site. They had a couple of grade 1 classes at the school and I went to one of those rather than a prep grade. In those days you sat on the floor and wrote with chalk on a little blackboard. They thought that Anton and I were twins. At first my brother and I were in the same class and then they decided to separate us and have one in Grade 1A and one in Grade 1B. Don't ask me why.

I think my primary school years were much happier than my high school years: the school was at the end of our street, I used to go home for lunch, and it wasn't far to walk to school.

Housing

At first we were living in two little bungalows in West Esplanade. After a year my parents had saved up enough money to buy a block of land in Ruth Street and my father built two rooms: a kitchen and a bedroom. The kitchen was everything in one, including kitchen, lounge room, and laundry. We all slept in the one bedroom. It was very difficult for my family to save that money. My mother hardly worked at all in the getting paid sense. My father was a carpenter and one of his earliest jobs was to work on the Snowy Mountains scheme. That helped bring in some money even though the family was separated.

When he returned from the Snowy Mountains my father worked as a carpenter around the area and went into partnership with another Dutch man by the name of Kropman. They set up a building company and worked as builders in partnership for a long time. Kropman had two sons, Anton and Peter, who also started

working in the company when they left school. With the company proceeds now covering three of the Kropman family they were going ahead, while we were still struggling with only one income. The financial situation of the partnership became unsatisfactory and to comply with legal requirements the partnership was disbanded. My father then continuing working on his own.

Disciplining Children

St Albans had many people from different cultures and different backgrounds. Some of them were sophisticated and some of them were peasants from rural backgrounds with little sophistication. Some of the ways they communicated with and brought up their children left a lot to be desired. When I was at primary school I've actually seen children being belted quite harshly by their parents. It was just horrendous and not something I was used to. We were never hit with a belt, ever. They used to hit you at school with a belt or a ruler, boys and girls. I was hit on my calves with a wooden ruler because I laughed or talked, and the teacher kept hitting us until one burst out crying. I had welts on my legs as a consequence of one of these episodes, which was uncalled for. We didn't grow up with that in Holland.

Physical punishment was more prevalent then. I remember seeing the brother of a friend of mine being chased around the back yard being whipped by his father with something that was like a cat-o'-nine-tails. I couldn't cope and had to go home. One evening while at the back door I heard a great commotion at our neighbour's place and through their window I could see the father laying into this nine-year-old girl. I got such a shock and was so upset I went in and said to my father he's killing her. He went next door and said he would call the police if the beating continued.

There were so many different backgrounds and different standards, different ethics, and communication was difficult. When we first arrived our neighbours were Yugoslavs who saw my brother and I - blond haired and speaking Dutch - and asked us in their broken English what our nationality was. We said Dutch but they thought we said Deutsch, and consequently they wouldn't speak to us because they associated us as being German. We had asked for water but they wouldn't give us any, they just closed the door. It was all about communication and perceptions. You learnt a few common words eventually – in Polish it was dzien dobry and baba jaga and few other things. We used to taunt "baba jaga, baba jaga."

St Albans High School

High school wasn't as pleasant as primary school. I think it was because at primary school in years 4 and 5 I was teacher's pet, and those years would have been my best years at school. I was a runner and the teacher coached me; he mentored me a lot. In grade 6 they did an experiment and put all the girls together with one teacher and all the boys together with another. I don't think that worked too well. The boys had Mr Ick and the girls had Mrs Leigh. I didn't enjoy that year so much.

I went to St. Albans High School in 1961 and was there for only four years, till the end of 1964. It started off alright in years 7 and 8, but then I lost my friends. Margaret Fielder went to Castlemaine, Susan Kosher moved to Blackburn, Yolanda Eder, with whom I was also friendly, went back to Germany, so I felt a bit lost. I was very friendly with Dace Svaigzne, who is now at St Andrews and has four children.

Yvonne Correlje and Yolanda Eder

Despite the departure of friends I had intended to complete high school. Education was seen as one means available to us to better ourselves and our situation, because we had nothing else. We really had nothing.

I've been making my own clothes from the age of 13. We had no money and I had no clothes. I used to wear the same thing day in and day out – luckily we had a school uniform – otherwise I didn't have very much. None of us had much. I had a school uniform that my mother bought for me when I was in grade 6. We had to have a winter uniform, two summer uniforms, two shirts for the winter, and a school blazer. That lasted me four years. When the elbows started falling out of sleeves I darned them myself. From the age of 13 in year 7 we did sewing, and my mother also taught me to sew. From then on I made all my own clothes, and I still do a lot.

Then my parents, after telling me all my life that whatever I wanted to be I could be, that whatever I chose as an occupation or profession was available to me, suddenly they did an about face and said my brother and I had to leave school. This was in year 9. I had an enormous fight with them and managed to stay on for year 10, but it took the gilt off the ginger bread, as the saying goes. They said they just could not afford it. My parents weren't the only ones in that situation. My mother never worked so my father

was the only one earning an income. When I was 14 my younger brother was born so he was the apple of their eye. They said they just couldn't afford for us to continue at school. I think at that time too the business partnership of my father might have been dissolving as well. Then we had a credit squeeze in the '60s.

I had some money in the bank because they had this scheme at school where every week you put a shilling in the bank, so I had a little bit of money in the bank. My mother insisted that the money be taken out to buy me clothes, because they didn't have it. Things were very tough. My brother went into bricklaying, because they said you could make good money doing that, and I stayed at school an extra year. But funnily enough they gave me a horse, which is something I really wanted.

Form 4A, 1964. Yolanda Eder is on the right end of the front row next to Yvonne Correlje.

Physical Activities

I used to love athletics and ballet, which I was good at but my parents couldn't afford to continue paying for lessons. I wanted to do ballet when I was 7 and they took me to lessons. Then in grade 4 or 5 I went by train after school to Footscray for lessons. It was surprising that it was really quite safe to travel by train in the evening at that time. For thruppence you could buy chips that were wrapped in newspaper – delicious. You'd make a little hole in the top and pull out the chips. I don't know why I stopped going to lessons, but I started up again when I was at high school until the money issue arose again, and then the lessons stopped. Not many people at St Albans High School did ballet, or had a horse.

I liked the sporting side of school life. It was compulsory that we do Phys. Ed. once a week and that we do sport. I loved sport, maybe because I was good at it, which is always a big plus. I was good at running, high jump, long jump, and hurdles. I did all of those events and even some swimming. There were some teachers there who gave up their time and I especially remember that Mrs Cameron's husband, who wasn't really at the school, gave up his time and taught swimming at the Sunshine pool. The Camerons did a lot for kids through the school and the youth club. Mrs Cameron was a typical Australian woman in that the heart was in the right place.

Another activity I really liked was horse riding, but that indulgence was outside the school. My interest in horses developed in grade 4 when I spent a lot of time drawing horses and reading about them. Later I would go to the riding school in Gum Road and learnt to ride. That was a lovely time. Horses were expensive to keep, so when my parents bought one for me in 1963 they said the upkeep was up to me. I would save up my pocket money to pay for the horse's upkeep and rode bareback for a while until I'd saved enough to buy a saddle.

McTaggart's Riding School, Kings Road

I used to keep the horse on Mr King's property. He was the former milkman of St Albans. I used to pay him 5 shillings a week to keep the horse there. I became very friendly with Mr King and he was very kind to me. He ended up buying the horse off me when I bought another horse.

Reflection on High School Years

I think the reason high school wasn't pleasant for me was that it was a long way to walk to school and back (I sometimes used to ride my bike), and it was less personal. At that age you're going through your adolescent years, which are not easy years. I think too the fact that I lost friends and then knew that I wasn't continuing made a lot of impact. My brother was sent off to the technical school in Sunshine because my

parents thought it better for boys to have the technical side of education. Had I known that I was going to have to leave early I would have done the secretarial course. At that time we could choose to do either the commercial or the professional stream, and you could choose to do French or German. If you chose to do the professional stream it meant you were going to channel yourself to either teachers' college or university. Those who did the commercial stream could still end up going through to higher education, but they had the typing and shorthand, which would have been a good skill to have to become a secretary.

What affected me academically was that some of the teachers that came from Germany or Russia had strong accents and it was hard to understand them. Mr Pavlov, who we had for maths, was a chain smoker and had the most diabolical reek of cigarettes about him that you couldn't ask him to come and talk to you because it would be so overpowering. That was a problem for me as I did really well with maths in years 7 and 8, then in year 9 it tapered off and I failed the subject in year 10.

Teachers

We had some very strong female teachers. The headmistress, Miss Taylor … well, you did not cross her path, or that of her offsider, Miss Bowles, the music teacher. Miss Taylor was so strict with the uniform; it had to be just so. When she left and Mrs Glyddon came onto the scene, she was also very strict. For a western suburbs high school in a deprived area, which is what it was, she reinforced that the girls had to wear their hat, you had to wear your jacket, you had to have the shirt and tie, and in winter you had to have grey gloves. Everything had to be 'spot on', and if you weren't well dressed representing the school, you got detention. The prefects would be monitoring you and even in summer you could not go home without wearing your jacket over your summer tunic. This is the way the public schools treated their students and we were no different. That was good because it set a standard. You'd quake in your shoes if you were sent to Miss Taylor for any misdemeanor.

Choir performing at the Speech Day, 1963. Yvonne Correlje and Margaret Fielder are in the back row, third and fourth from the left.

Music was part of the school curriculum, and we learnt a lot about music from Miss Bowles. She did give us a very good appreciation and she introduced us to classical music. I loved being in the school choir.

Mr Wilkinson was a nice man though I don't remember him very well. Mr Torpey was pretty strict. I think there was more control and discipline than there is now. You had to behave, and if you didn't you got into trouble. If you came late you got detention. They had standards to which they adhered to and they enforced them. By and large we had respect for the teachers. Miss Murray did a teaching round at the school and she spoke French with an Australian accent. She then came to teach at the school. I thought she was very straight laced and didn't have much of a sense of humour.

The year 9 and 10 boys were shocking; they could give the teachers a hell of a ribbing. Mr McLeish was a good teacher who looked very Scottish and in year 9 we had him for English. Lindsay Chatterton used to sit in the seat right in front of the teacher's desk. One day Mr McLeish came into the first class after recess and put his foot up on the chair, leaned forward, and started talking to the class. Suddenly Lindsay raised his hand and said, "Sir! Sir! in an insistent manner. McLeish ignored him until Lindsay said "Sir! Your fly's undone!" Of course there was immediate uproar and we all dissolved into laughter. He went absolutely beetroot red and walked out of the classroom and didn't come back for the rest of the period. We laughed and laughed.

After High School

I left school at the end of year 10. I remember walking home on the last day of school feeling very alone and thinking this was the last of my school years - how do I feel? I realised I didn't feel anything. I remember that walk home clearly.

I went to work for the Commonwealth of Australia on the seventh floor of that green building in Spring Street. I had a clerical job with Family Allowances and I should have stuck at that but I'm too peripatetic. In those days if you worked overtime you got paid a meal allowance and you got sent home in a taxi as well as being paid overtime.

I always had the intention of going on to university so I started doing night school, but that took some adjustment. I was working full time and travelling to the city by train, and then it was all too hard.

Evening Studies

In 1966 I was going to night school at University High, where I did two subjects, and the following year I did another two subjects. Unknown to me, doing four subjects in two years meant you could not go into Year 12; you had to have done five

subjects in two years. So I couldn't do my matriculation. I was absolutely devastated.

I wanted to go to teachers college but I had to have an income because my parents would/could not keep me. The following year I did a preliminary year of art and design at Prahran, which was four subjects, and I also did English Expression for Year 12 at University High School. I thought that would give me the ability to do teachers college. Consequently I was working full time and doing 15 hours a week of study after hours, which was four evenings a week and Saturday morning as well, and all by public transport to Prahran and back. It was really hard going. It started off fine but come winter the only way I could cope was to drop one class per week and rotate that for each subject, which meant I missed one class a month in each subject. I was very determined and got credits for everything.

At one stage what I wanted to do – and this was also a childhood dream – was become a flight attendant. I had gone for an interview with Qantas when I was 20 but nothing ever eventuated, so I went back to the idea of teaching.

Being Assaulted

Constant travel on that long trip from the city to the end of the line at St Albans exposed one to the seamier side of public transport and being on the streets late at night.

One night coming back from night classes about 11 o'clock at night I was attacked by a psychopath. That's what he was, because there were some real nutters out there. No harm came to me on that occasion but I was fortunate because he was frightened away. I was coming home from night class with a girlfriend who was going to Melbourne Uni. Normally we were picked up at the station by her father, my father, or my brother Anton (they would take it in turns) because it was a long walk and the roads weren't made. We arrived at the station and stood there waiting and waiting – there were no mobile phones then to contact each other, and few people had the landline phones. What had happened was that my brother got bogged and it took him a while to get the car out. After waiting a while we set off for home on foot. My friend lived near the Ajayoglu shop in West Esplanade, I said goodnight to her and then continued on my own.

When I walked past the shop there was a guy standing there but I ignored him and decided to walk through the school because least the yard was dry – it had been raining and I was weighted down with bags and an umbrella. As I walked through the school ground I could hear his footsteps following me closer and closer. I thought: If I run I'm done for, because he's going to catch me for sure. I hastened my footsteps and just as I managed to get out of the grounds he put his arm around me and I saw his face under the street light. I shook him off and kept walking. This is another thing about St Albans and the people there. I did not feel confident in knocking on someone's door and asking for refuge; not at 11 o'clock at night. They would be suspicious, they probably wouldn't ask me in, they wouldn't understand what I was trying to say, and they wouldn't have had a telephone. This crossed my mind many times and so I decided to keep walking.

There was a car parked on the side of the road so the man dropped back, but as I got to the corner of Emily, Gertrude and Ruth streets he jumped on me and tried to throw me on the ground. I struggled with him and hit him on the head with the umbrella. The umbrella broke but it made no impact on him. Then I started screaming for help and at that moment my brother turned the corner in the car. As soon as the headlights appeared this guy ran away. My brother saw him and asked me what was happening. I told him what had happened. Anton then set off in the car trying to find him. It was winter, late at night so there wasn't anyone around, not many cars, no people. We reported the incident months later when by sheer coincidence I saw the man. We then went to the police and reported the assault. About six months later there was an article in the local paper about this guy because he'd raped his 14 year old sister.

Marriage

I met my future husband while I was studying at Prahran and then in January 1970 we got married. As he was a first year out teacher he was sent to the country for his first position. We went to Wedderburn, which is north-west of Bendigo and lived there for two years. That was where my daughter Samantha was born, at the Bendigo base hospital. Simon, my first son, was born in Charlton in the bush nursing hospital. It was all very casual - the doctor would turn up in his shorts and knee length socks that men wore in those days.

A year later in 1971 we moved to Kerang where my youngest son James was born. It was while we were there that my ex-husband played football. As captain-coach he was paid, and by living in an education department house, which had a wonderful lot of fruit trees in the back, we were able start saving for a deposit for our own house.

I made absolutely everything: I made bread, I made all the clothes, I made jam, I made everything because we were on a mission: we had to save money. We had a goal. We managed to save quite a bit, fortunately. We then came to Melbourne and lived with my parents as a means of saving more money. We lived in a 14-foot caravan with three little children at the back of my parents' block in St Albans. So my daughter Samantha's first school was St Albans Primary, the same one I went to. I used to go and pick her up for lunch.

Son's Critical Illness

Then my son James became critically ill with a disorder known as 'protein losing enteropathy', which is a very rare lymphatic disorder. He ended up in the Alfred Hospital in intensive care and was there for about three months. Winter was approaching so living in the caravan was very, very difficult. We were able to move into my brother-in-law's house while they were in Europe on long service leave. That was in East Brighton, where we stayed all of second term, and it was much closer to the Alfred Hospital. James had a lot of health problems: salmonella, septicaemia, pneumonia, internal haemor-rhaging, and thrombosis. He was so sick he was only given 24 hours to live. At one stage the hospital asked whether I wanted them to try absolutely everything to save his life, and my answer to them was if he can cope and get though it, who am I to say no. I'd be letting him down if I didn't try. Fortunately he pulled through.

It took a lot out of me because you're hanging in there and hanging in there with all your reserves and you've got two children and one of those just starting school, she went to 3 schools in her first year. Simon was only three years old. My children still have vivid memories of washing their hands in disinfectant and putting on a gown and mask whenever we went to see James. It takes a lot out of you emotionally and as a result of that I couldn't cry. I couldn't cry physically for years and years. Now I'm better.

Everybody deals with grief in very different ways. I think I just internalised it so much in order just to get through each day because that's all you can do, take it day by day. If anything upset me I'd got a headache but I couldn't have an outlet for my emotions. People go through grief and hardship and everybody deals with it in a different way. Even in the '70s there was no counselling. People don't know how to approach you, so they stay away because they don't know how to deal with it. People need to talk about what they're experiencing but people stay away. Whether that was the cause of the marriage breakdown … but lots of things contribute. James was on a special diet for years, but you wouldn't know that now. He developed into a strong and athletic young man and ended up playing league football like his brother. Now he is senior business analyst for Melbourne Football Club.

Returning to Study

I think I needed something else to focus on. In 1974 while James was in hospital I read in the paper there was a new scheme accepting mature age students at university and you didn't have to have that piece of paper that I had been try to get for years to enable me to study. We moved to Montmorency and I did one subject, HSC English Literature, in a very relaxed environment at the neighbourhood house in Greensborough. We sat on couches drinking coffee and the teacher was very relaxed. That year I applied for and got into Latrobe University. Whitlam was in power and introduced changes in the tertiary education sector. He made a lot of mistakes but he had a lot of vision, and if it wasn't for him I wouldn't have got into university.

I was doing English at Latrobe and it was the encouragement of my ex-husband for me to do Dutch. Then I did Dutch at Melbourne University as complementary studies and I obtained first class honours. I started doing second year honours and transferred from Latrobe to Melbourne and ended up doing my degree in languages in Swedish, Germanic studies, and old English. I studied Beowolf in the old English, and The Battle of Maldon, and Alfred's Wars with the Danes ... It was fascinating stuff. When you study language you study a lot of the culture, history, and the society of the people, and even the food. While I was doing psychology I heard about ESL (English as a Second Language) which was starting as a teaching method and that was very new at the time. I knew that that was what I had to do. After finishing at Melbourne I went back to Latrobe in 1982 to do ESL and English methods in Diploma of Education.

Teaching Languages

In the interim I was teaching Dutch at Dandenong TAFE. It was nice. By doing the Dutch there I got to know the head of department and I got a position as an ESL teacher in their Access department teaching English in a community house to migrants. We had some very interesting people: Chilean refuges, Ethiopians, Vietnamese boat people and Cambodian refugees, Polish refugees as well. Lots of interesting adults. I moved across to teaching communication skills and in between

my husband and I separated, and I lost my father in '88.

Father's Cancer

My dad was diagnosed as having cancer May 1988, and he died in August that year on his birthday. He said the fact that so much of the building materials he'd been handling in the Snowy Mountains had been fibrous asbestos cement may have contributed to his death … But he was also a smoker, which doesn't help.

I then enrolled in a post-graduate course in human resource development. That was run by Victoria College which has since amalgamated with several others and become Deakin University. We did things like instructional design, facilitation, career counselling, and organisational development.

The Corporate World

I managed to leave teaching and get a position with the SEC Credit Union as their operations manager. I left after 18 months because I got a position with a second tier chartered accounting firm and I became their national human resources manager. It was a difficult position in that I was on my own in Melbourne while their head office was in Perth and I was supposed to manage the HR function in Melbourne. Their organisational structure is like a partnership in a law firm with their partners and also their other hierarchical structure. Trying to get all that information into a database that was just coming into being for reporting purposes was quite challenging. When they were rationalising their structure I became a casualty of that rationalisation. In other words, I lost my job.

Then in 1993 I got a position with Lend Lease in Brisbane, so I sold the house in Montmorency and moved north. My daughter was doing engineering at Monash, and Simon had moved to play football for the West Australian Football League for South Fremantle. James was the last one at school and he didn't want to come to Brisbane with me. I took my dog to Brisbane as my only companion. I worked in Brisbane as a Human Resources consultant, which entailed mainly working for external clients and getting their systems onto data bases. We did a lot of travelling for Lend Lease, which was a good company. I travelled to the gold Coast, Tweed Heads, Coolangatta Hospital, Tweed Heads RSL, Queensland Health, the equivalent of the RACV, and others. I bought a lovely home, a Queenslander, in Bulimba. Unfortunately the job was not really what I thought it would be as a lot of the work became more technical than the HR side. I had a discussion with the state manager and we agreed to part. They were good because they paid for my removal expenses back to Melbourne. They're a good company. They work you tough but they also do the right thing by their employees.

Coming Back to Melbourne

When I came back in 1995 I was living in Greensborough and my son Simon decided to come back from WA because he then went to do phys ed at RMIT. At that stage James was going to Deakin. When he started university there were so many other students applying for courses he ended up at Deakin in Warrnambool and lived in a caravan at the age of 18! He just had to get in somewhere. Samantha in the interim had finished her engineering course. My children did really did very well.

After a while I got a job as project manager with the ANZ bank where I managed a team of instructional designers in lots of customer service and sales training. However there was a change in the head of department to a real number cruncher. I advised against appointing particular training consultants because I had assessed they would not be able to meet our requirements, but I was overruled due to a bit of nepotism. Because of that action on my part my boss more or less told me that my days there were numbered. When my forebodings proved to be correct I could see it was becoming a case of shooting the messenger to save the ego and I got fed up with the bullying that ensued and left. That was in July 1997 and I really haven't had a full time job since.

Seeking Employment

I got a part-time position at Monash University and worked there for one year. My daughter Samantha is a traffic engineer and has Masters in Engineering Science. She was senior lecturer at Monash and set up the bus and coach course, because all bus drivers, owner operators had to go through this accreditation. I worked on that course for a year and during this time I applied for a position as a director on the Members Australia Credit Union Board, which was a three-year term. I probably should have stayed on there but during my term they were offering redundancies to reduce the number of directors on the Board. This was the first time ever I had an opportunity to get some money for a redundancy so I took that. I then went back to part-time teaching.

I've also done stock broking and even traded futures. I worked as a stock broker and put a lot of my own money into shares. When I was employed at Monash and I was a Director as well I decided to buy my current place in Clifton Hill. I've now been here 6 years.

When I was at the ANZ my aim was to work there for a number of years, and I was on a good salary because I was in a management position. My aim was to buy a big old place in the country and run a bed and breakfast, and I would still like to do that but you need a partner to do that as it would be hard work on your own.

Interest in Art

I was always interested in art and drawing since I was very young. My grandfather painted and my father painted. When I was in Grade 2 one of my drawings – it was something with lots of fairies - was put into an art exhibition at the Footscray Town Hall. I didn't win a prize but it was an honour to be included. My parents gave me some oil paints when I was doing secondary school. At school, art, music, English, sport, even French, were my favourite subjects.

After high school I didn't practice art until I enrolled in the art and design course preliminary year. That gave me another opportunity to be creative again, which I really enjoyed.

Art is something I should have done earlier as I'm very creative and it's a passion. I have a strong creative need. I put art aside while I was going to university and had children and didn't pick it up again until I was in Brisbane and did a drawing course. That took me back into it and when I came back to Melbourne I did life drawing and then started doing botanical art in water colour. I'm now dabbling with some oils and have some "work in progress" sitting on the easel for the past year. It's something I'll get back to when I can because I find chasing full time work is a full-time job.

In Conclusion

After all this tenacity and aspiring to get my university degrees and work in the corporate world, which I did, here I am, still looking to find my niche in the world. But life is a process; it's not the destination, it's the constant seeking, discovering and learning and doing. After all, to arrive at the destination is to die.

Yvonne Correlje, 2006.

Lynette Cox: Children Services Planner

Both my parents, Jean Thomas and Russell Cox, were born and raised in Sunshine, so I am definitely an Aussie girl. Dad's father had moved from Ballarat as a young apprentice with Sunshine Harvesters. Mum's family owned a butcher shop in Sunshine.

Both families were predominantly of English stock. The earliest arrival was a family of seven who arrived by ship at Geelong in 1852; one child died and another was born during the sea voyage from England. The family then drove by bullock dray to the goldfields at Ballarat. The latest arrival from overseas was my maternal grandmother who migrated from Scotland with her parents around 1910, at eleven years of age. Her father was a Swedish sea captain who'd lived in Scotland, overseeing a country estate, prior to migrating to Australia. They settled in Bacchus Marsh where he managed the local racecourse.

Choosing St Albans

Mum and dad met at McKays where they both worked, dad as a toolmaker and mum in the pricing section. (McKays was previously Sunshine Harvester, later McKays Massey Harris, Massey Harris, and finally Massey Ferguson)

Before their marriage in 1947 mum and dad bought a block of land in Percy Street St Albans, with the aim of building a house once they could afford to. At the time these blocks were about half the price of those in Sunshine and Albion.

As was customary at the time, mum left her job once they married, and to save money, they lived with dad's parents in Albion, occupying separate rooms at the back of the house.

I was born at the Sunshine hospital in 1949.

Arrival in St Albans

In 1951 dad started building our house in St Albans, a two-bedroomed weatherboard home. He and his father did all the construction themselves, a task which took 12 months of weekend work. We moved there in 1952 just before my brother Robert was born. Some years later the third bedroom and back verandah were added.

At that time older established houses stretched from the tennis courts on the corner of Main Road East and Percy Street down to our block. Around the time our house was built there was rapid development going on in the area due

to post-war migration and within a few years houses stretched all the way to St Albans Road and behind us to the High School.

As a young child I remember lots of open space, the grass and the Scotch thistles, the creek over the road (later filled in), Errington Reserve around the corner, bike riding, and playing cricket in the side street - good places for playing.

Primary Education

I attended St Albans Primary in West Esplanade then moved to St Albans East when it opened in 1956. I seem to remember we had 52 kids in our grade 6 class. Could that possibly be true?

Some of the happiest memories of these years are of walking to and from school with friends from around our street: Denise Rodgers, Lorraine Grant, and Valda Brown. We had fun talking and playing along the way.

Secondary Education

I went to St Albans High School from 1961 to 1966. I started off in 1C and was made Girl Form Captain but wasn't there for the official class photograph. Then I was Girl Form Captain again in 1962 and have that photograph as proof.

Lynette Cox (second from left, front row) and other form captains, 1962

My best memories of the high school years are:

- Sitting with Helen Smith, in front of Nicki Szwed and Joe Ribarow, and laughing a lot;
- Buying a sausage roll or pastie for lunch, a meringue, and spending the rest on lollies;
- Fun group outings - picnics, bus trips, the Melbourne Show;
- Saturday night dances at the St Albans Youth Club;
- Fifth form (Year 11) - being the only girl in the class with 16 boys.

My worst memories of the time are:

- One school sports day falling over in my new spiked runners and coming last;
- Being chastised by the Principal for picking a rose from the school garden;
- Studying German in junior forms and Chemistry in fifth form - I was hopeless at both;
- Fifth form - being the only girl in the class with 16 boys. It had its challenges. I was almost, but not quite, one of the boys, and not sure how to behave - overall a fairly discomforting year.

Lynette and Helen with their admirers, 1964.

Lynette and a bevy of boys with Miss Butler, 1965.

My best friends were Helen Smith, Nicki Szwed, Joe Ribarow, and Peter Barbopolous. I was secretly keen on David Dusting for many years, but my first romance was with Vova Karol, in Year 11.

As for favourite teachers, I really enjoyed Miss Goodwin's Australian history lessons. Mr Rayner and Miss Taylor were sensitive to my situation in fifth form and allowed me to sit with the boys instead of alone on my side of the room as other teachers expected of me.

After High School

After High School I began a course at Emily McPherson College with the intention of becoming a Domestic Science teacher. After a year of studying Organic Chemistry, as well as facing the weekly cooking class and subsequent sink full of dirty dishes, I decided it wasn't the career for me.

Then I enrolled at Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers College and graduated with a teaching Diploma in 1969. Some years later I completed the newly available degree in Early Childhood Education.

After teaching pre-school for 10 years in various locations (Sunshine, Warrnambool,

Carlton, Hobart) I moved into childrens services planning and management, working in both State and local government positions (Sunshine, Melbourne City, and Community Services Victoria at Essendon). From there I progressed into broader community services management and planning roles, again mostly in local government (Wangaratta, Hobsons Bay, Sydney).

Since leaving Sydney for Brisbane 5 years ago I've pursued another big interest and dabbled in property development - buying and renovating houses for resale. This has been a real enjoyment but alas not very lucrative - at this stage I don't plan on continuing with it.

Personal Life

At the age of 22 I married a local St Albans boy, Garry Cameron, and we moved to Koroit (near Warrnambool) where he studied accountancy and coached football and I taught pre-school. The marriage was short-lived, and we separated three years later.

At 29 I met Gregrory Maddock, a Queenslander, working in local government in Melbourne. We married in 1980 and have two daughters, Jacqueline (25 years) and Katherine (21 years).

As a family we've moved around quite a lot following Greg's rapidly progressing career in local government. We've lived in Brunswick, Keilor, Wangaratta, Williamstown, and then Sydney for the lead up to and staging of the Olympics (a definite highlight). Five years ago we moved to Brisbane, which I enjoy very much. My brother Robert and his wife (Kuki Zsolnai, another St Albans girl) also live here now, as does my mother.

Unfortunately, my private life has recently hit a rocky patch. I am now a widow, having lost Greg suddenly and unexpectedly 18 months ago. I do, however, have wonderful memories of the truly great person that he was and the interesting life we shared.

As for the future, I plan to indulge in all that retirement has to offer: socializing more, reading more, exercising more, improving my bridge, travelling more, maybe even cooking more - and be ready to embrace whatever the next stage of life brings.

Lyn Maddock, 2006

Otto Czernik: Electronics Technician, Quality Manager, Cattle Breeder

My family heritage is of European origin, with a Polish-Ukrainian father and a German mother. I was born in Germany in 1948 before the family migrated to Australia in 1950 under the sponsorship of the IRO. At first we lived in the Bonegilla and Broad-meadows' migrant camps before moving to St Albans in 1952. I have a younger sister, Helen, who was born in 1951, the year after we arrived in Australia.

My father, Wladimir Czernik, was born in Lvov in 1911 and grew up in that area which had been part of Poland for centuries, but was taken over by the Russians and annexed to the Ukraine. During Russia's control of the area they had pursued a policy of intense "Russi-fication", which included trying to suppress the teaching of the Polish language and culture, as well as dividing the landowners from the people who worked on the land. These policies had led to the rise of nationalist movements amongst the Polish and Ukrainian peasants. The Ukrainian people in the area also wanted agrarian reform, partly because the big landowners were either Russian or Polish.

Some families in the villages surrounding Lvov were of Ukrainian ancestry, others of Polish, and some were of Jewish or other minority background. Within the surrounding region there were even villagers of German ancestry, so it was a real multi-ethnic population and one can guess at the heartache that local people endured when these three nations were involved in battles against each other, particularly when the battle fronts invaded their own farms and villages.

My father was drafted into the Russian army and in 1943 was fighting against the Germans. When his platoon was defeated, surrendering to the Germans was the only option, but from the Russian army's point of view surrender was treated as desertion, because they expected you to continue fighting even at the cost of your own life. Later this was described as Stalin's "last bullet order", where a soldier was expected to keep the last bullet to kill himself rather than be taken prisoner.

As a prisoner of war my father was sent off to the town of Kassel in Germany and assigned work in factories. When the Americans liberated the area he was employed with them as a

trainee mechanic working on the maintenance of jeeps and other army vehicles. The Americans had access to better food supplies and prospects seemed more positive.

My mother, Annalise Hellmuth, was born in 1927 in the Hessen region, part of the Central German Uplands. Her parents were farmers in a small village called Alten Bauna, just south of Kassel, and mum grew up in this pretty little village, which later became part of a bigger town known as Baunatal.

Having seen some paintings of the landscape, I know that the old village setting in the 1930s was a picture of rural charm. Returning from the trip to the main town must have been a wonderful sight, because mum described how you would see the beauty of gently undulating fields planted with oats or rye, with sheaves bundled together into stooks where the harvesting had already started. Harvesting was done the traditional way: farmers wielded their scythes while others, including the women, came along behind them to bind the sheaves.

Country farming may not be quite as romantic as the pretty pictures of the countryside, but it is an honest living, and mum carried out her share of the farming responsibilities, alongside her sister and brother, looking after the livestock and working in the garden. Pig farming is not delicate work, but mum did her share, which including helping with the slaughter of animals when it was necessary.

Her other job was as a baby sitter for farmers around the district, but payment for this was often 'in kind' such as a bag of potatoes. There was also the regular chores in the fruit and vegetable garden for their domestic consumption.

During the war mum was working in one of the factories, and this is where she met her future husband, Wladimir Czernik, probably in 1943. Some of the factory workers were billeted in the village, and this is where they had the opportunity to meet again. She was in house number 30, he in number 98, so it was inevitable that they should meet again sometime. They continued to meet when they could, and so their romance developed.

Mum and dad married in 1947 and then in November 1948 I was born.

Emigrating to Australia

Mum and dad decided to emigrate because much of Kassel had been destroyed through the war, and the political turmoil in Poland and the Ukraine meant it was impossible for dad to return there. So, in 1949 they were accepted by the International Refugee Organisation as part of the program for resettling displaced persons.

On the third of March 1950 the family arrived at Station Pier, Melbourne, on the US-registered ship the Heinzelmann. Passengers were taken by train and bus to Bonegilla on the New South Wales border for processing, before being transferred to other regional centres.

Some close friendships were formed on the ship and at the hostels, and people have remained in contact ever since. Dad and some of the other men were sent off to Williamstown to start their two-year work contracts while their wives and children went to Broadmeadows. Basically, dad worked for the PMG digging ditches and laying cables. Mum sometimes talked about the hardship that separation created for families. There was little privacy for individuals or couples in these camps. The women would sleep in dormitories while their men lived many miles away closer to their work during the week and would return on the weekends. The camp had rows of tents lined up along one side and couples had to take turns using these for a bit of marital privacy.

After a while some of the women got fed up with this arrangement, and mum was one of them who said she wanted to normalise the family arrangements by moving to where dad was staying. The authorities in Williamstown were not happy when Anna and a friend turned up on the doorstep demanding to stay with their husbands, and threatened them with deportation. When the women called their bluff the authorities had to back down. Eventually some suggestion was made about the possibility of sharing a caravan nearby.

Settling in St Albans

In 1952 the family bought a plot of land in Fox Street, St Albans. At that time this area was just open fields. The house site was near the corner of Fox and Theodore Streets, and in between was a low point in the otherwise flat landscape. This would flood in the wet weather into a large pool being fed by water flowing across the paddocks from Taylors Road. Sometimes the only way to get across the flooded road was to take off your socks and shoes, roll up your skirt or trouser legs, and walk across barefoot. In fact, for quite some time this had been the site of a dam which had served as the first water supply in the area.

Building the home started with two small structures: one was the laundry cum bathroom and kitchen, while the separate bungalow contained two small bedrooms. Gradually the rest of the weatherboard house was added on. Dad did most of the work himself. This is where the friendships established in the hostels proved their worth as several families helped each other in the tasks of building, the men taking turns to work on each other's houses.

Apart from helping with the house-building, mum worked in the garden to help feed a growing family.

Of course, St Albans in the 1950s was a much smaller place than it is today. Then, as people will often tell you, you would leave the money for the milkman or the baker outside in the milk box and no one would take it. People were so trusting they would not even lock their doors. Now you couldn't do it.

There were very few shops then. A number of houses or bungalows were being built around the place, many of them by Mr Eisner who was one of the few builders in the area.

Dad worked as a machinist with Massey Ferguson for over 25 years, and ended up working as a fitter and turner, then worked at Mitchells the Brush People for a while before being asked to return to Masseys. He retired at the age of 65, and then he died of a heart attack in 1982 at the age of 71. My mum died in 2000 at the age of 73.

Primary School

I started at the old St Albans Primary School in 1955 and was there till mid 1958. I don't remember very many specific events, though it wasn't all fun a games. I've always tended to be a quiet person but I soon learnt you had to defend yourself when you were picked on in the school ground – having your head thumped into the metal taps by someone from behind when you were trying to have a drink of water was not a very friendly experience. My sister Helen, who is three years younger than me, lost the sight of one eye in her first year at school when some boys threw an explosive device they'd made into the shelter shed and a piece of metal pierced her eye. Another girl was luckier because she only had her ear pierced.

St Albans Primary School, Grade 1B. Otto is back row, five from the right.

Mid way through 1958 the St Albans North Primary started operating, and because my sister and I were living virtually around the corner, we were both transferred there. Because we were so close we never had any excuse why we couldn't get to school on time, except in the winter. Between our house and the school was a low-lying area that would get flooded and in bad conditions would be impassable, so that was an occasional opportunity to skip classes legally.

High School

I started at St Albans High School in 1961. One of the unfortunate accidents that occurred early that year was that a family friend, John Kasjan, died in a hit and run accident. He had decided to go swimming in the Maribyrnong River at Green Gully and set off on his push bike. When he didn't return people went searching for him but didn't find him until the next day. He'd obviously been hit by a car because he'd suffered horrific head injuries and was in a coma in the hospital for two weeks before dying.

In the early 'sixties a few new Polish immigrants started arriving at the school. One of them was in my class and though I only spoke a few words of Polish I tried to help him whenever I could because there was no other help provided to these students apart from pairing them off with someone who could communicate with them. During one of the religious instruction classes he asked me a question about what was going on and when I replied I ended up getting detention for talking in class. So how are you supposed to help someone if you are not allowed to talk with them?

Mr Pavlov and Volley Ball

I was not good at playing either football or cricket, but in 1962 I started playing volley ball,

which suited me much better. Mr Pavlov was a good and just teacher and he was a very encouraging coach and motivator to the volley ball teams. I think it was under his guidance that St Albans won the schools' Western District Championship pennant for 6 years in a row.

St Albans High School volley ball team, 1962

A couple of years later I joined a group of the senior players who still wanted to continue playing volley ball though we had already left school. We started practising at the St Albans Community Youth Club for a while, which wasn't big enough, so we had to find other premises and ended up at West Footscray YMCA where there was more room and bigger court areas. The condition of using their facilities was that we had to represent that centre for 12 months in the YMCA competition, which suited us fine. So about 1965 we played under the name West Footscray YMCA Renegades and won the championship that season for them, which was their first ever major win.

Paul Pavlov was a fantastic support because he continued to coach us over this time even though at that stage we were no longer connected with the high school, and he usually went out of his way to drive some of us to the matches. He'd always told us he'd be happy to help us if we were interested in continuing playing the game, so we accepted that. We joined the Victorian Volley Ball Association in C Grade and very soon were playing in A Grade. We just lost the Grand Final in our final year because several of our key players couldn't make is as they were sitting for university exams. From memory, the team over this time included David Pringle, Tony Vandekolk, Leon and Victor Troszczji, Claude Calandra, Vander Dasler, John and Zbigniew Kruk, and a couple of others whose names I've forgotten. Unfortunately a number of our players had to devote more time to their university studies and I was busy with my apprenticeship, so after about three years we called it quits. We had enjoyed ourselves tremendously and were grateful for all the support we received from a dedicated teacher: Mr Pavlov

Ex-high school volley ball team at the award ceremony Victorian Volley Ball Association 1965-66

Working in Electronics

In 1962 I started experimenting with making crystal sets. While other boys were playing cricket or football after school I was more interested in electronics. In those days television had been around for only a few years, and though radios were much more common they were the big, old designs using valve technology. Except, of course, for the crystal sets. I became fascinated by them because with a diode, coil, and earpiece you could make yourself a little radio; you didn't even need batteries. With transistors starting to come on the scene the earpieces were now quite small.

When I was at high school I worked out that you that you could put the diode and coil into the shell of a fountain pen, for the aerial you clipped onto the metal frame of the desk, and you'd conceal the wire to the earpiece by running it up your sleeve. The reception range was not broad, but it was great for listening to the cricket, as long as you were discreet about its use in the classroom. After all, it was only natural that boys would be fiddling with their fountain pens.

I made a few of these and sold them to classmates. It was fun to do and it got me a bit of pocket money. Things were going well until, in the relative quite of one classroom, several of the back row students simultaneously shouted out because of some marvellous catch or something. Of course the teacher then sussed it out and confiscated the devices for the rest of the lesson. He ordered me to stay behind after school. I waited for him, uncertain as to how much trouble I was in. As it turned out, he was quite impressed by the things and wanted me to make one for him, so that was a relief. That was my first public venture into electronics.

I finished High School at the end of 1964 and then started a TV and radio apprenticeship with Teletone, which was a one-man business in Main Road West. The apprenticeship was between 1965 and 1969. That didn't mean that my time in the education system was finished, because as well as the apprenticeship school one day a week I was also enrolled for evening classes that I continued for 7 years. Then in 1970 I joined the Department of Civil Aviation in

their Radio Installation Department and worked for them for four years and also taking on some more evening studies.

About 12 months of my time with DCA was spent at the Tullamarine Airport installing all the cables for their communications system when the airport was being built. This included their videos, emergency services, tower control panels, and radar. I was in charge of five apprentices while that work was in progress, so it more responsibility for me. Other work for Civil Aviation included installing equipment in Tasmania and King Island. Unfortunately there was little opportunity for promotion and when the internal politics became unbearable I left.

I then started working at the Southern Cross Hotel as their chief technician looking after the radios and televisions in 640 rooms. I was again in charge of some apprentices. The only problem with the job was being on call 24 hours a day, which sometimes was quite inconvenient when you were living many miles away.

Then the Hyatt Hotel approached me to take on a similar role with them, and I went there because it was better paid. This was about 1972 when I had married Christine, a young widow with two children. The Hyatt then asked me to service a new range of equipment they were introducing to automatically dispense mixed drinks. They wanted to send me to Japan to train in the servicing and maintenance of these electronic machines. Being recently married I didn't want to go overseas so I left that work and started up my own radio and TV repair business (O.C. Electronics) from home. While it generated income the cash flow was variable because customers were often slow in paying.

The Security Job that Wasn't

When in 1974 Chris was expecting our first child I decided some more regular and reliable income would be desirable. I thought of taking on some security work with one of the main armoured guard companies. I had obtained my licence to work as a security guard but hadn't yet applied for a pistol licence when they asked me to relieve in the security line-up guarding $4 million in bullion on display at the Southern Cross. I was uneasy about this and refused to do it before I had acquired all the proper licences. Then on the way home there was a news flash that two security guards had been shot at High Point. When I got home Chris was so affected by that news that she said if I became a security guard she would leave. Anyway, I withdrew my application for that position.

O. C. Electronics

In 1975 I worked with the ABC while I continued operating the home business after hours. Then in 1976 I rented a shop in Macedon and tried building up a business out there. I was there six months when the ceiling caved in after some rainstorms and destroyed most of my stock, so I moved to newer premises in Gisborne. The rent was $75 week, which doesn't sound much these days but it was big enough then when profits were small. Working from Gisborne was OK though it required Chris to give me a hand running the shop when I was out on service calls. She was looking after the baby, Melissa, at the same time, so it was a bit of a task.

We bought a house in New Gisborne. After about four years we experienced ongoing problems with neighbours and decided to moved to South Gisborne. We bought a largish block of land and I designed the home to take advantage of the views. We might have been in Gisborne but there were views all the way to Geelong as long as you used the binoculars to see that far.

Unfortunately the business suffered because of the high mortgages and the high interest rates that people were paying – I had to buy on credit at a hefty rate while customers tried to delay their payments as long as possible to earn that fraction more interest for themselves – and I was caught in the middle.

The transfer over to colour TVs also caught me with many unpaid bills as customers brought their black and white sets to be repaired and then didn't pay, deciding instead to buy a colour set from somewhere else. I also learnt the hard way that installing antennas on a deferred payment arrangement was not much good when the house was resold or repossessed and the customers were not traceable for debt collection purposes. As a small business in a competitive market you worked on small margins and had to offer some benefits to attract customers, but the risks were great.

With trade creditors to be paid and my bank overdrafts at high rates I was well and truly caught in an increasing debt spiral. Furthermore, my bank manager would only give me a loan if I had a permanent job.

Working for Flexdrive

I closed the shop and applied for employment with Flexdrive in Gisborne, and was offered a position in their quality control department. Working full time there and still running the radio and TV repair business from home meant that I was able to pay off all the outstanding business debts. I was working both jobs in tandem as well as trying to maintain the garden and grounds of a large block of land as well as keeping up with some studies.

Health Problems

Looking back it's clear that the pace was too demanding, and what happened in the end was that I had a heart attack in March 1984. They didn't operate on that occasion but told me I had to reduce stress and not work so hard. That's a lot easier to say than to do.

Then in September 1984 I suffered another heart attack, and this time they had to operate, though it took some time to arrange everything. So at the age of 36 I had triple bypass surgery and despite some complications survived it all. I was recuperating in the Queen Vic Hospital when it was rocked by a big explosion – it was the car bomb that had been set off in front of the Russell Street Police Headquarters.

Six weeks after coming home from hospital my wife said she wanted a divorce. It was a complicated time for the family. I went to stay at mum's place and we eventually divorced and sold the house.

While I was working at Flexdrive I also took on some part-time studies through Footscray Institute to get some formal qualifications in quality control. During 16 years with Flexdrive's quality control department I had been promoted to supervisor and then to assistant manager.

Relationship and Career Changes

Alison Strack was one of the other staff members at Flexdrive and she was also divorced. We started going out together in the late 'eighties and then rented a place together in East Kyneton. We exchanged marriage commitments informally at Alison's parents' property in Riddells Creek before a small group of close friends and relatives. We bought eight acres of land in Kyneton and planned to start a small farm specialising in breeding Dexter cattle.

Unfortunately the automotive industry in Australia took a downturn from which it never recovered. Flexdrive was taken over by a Japanese company, and the economic rationalisations they introduced meant mainly one thing as far as workers were concerned: retrenchments. Both Alison and I were retrenched, so we used the retrenchment money to start building our own house.

We parked a caravan on our block of land and lived in that for a year while we were building the house. We had the foundations and slab poured professionally, and after that it was all a hard slog by Alison and myself, and a few friends on the weekends. Though we worked together we also had our specialities. As I was doing the post and beams and the structural framework Alison was attending to the mud brick walls. It's been a slow process. We have now been living in the house for ten years and there are still a few unfinished bits, but it's home.

Breeding Dexter Cattle

We started breeding Dexter cattle in 1994 and by 1999 our cows and bulls were winning prizes in the Royal Melbourne Show and in regional shows. We are a very small concern and to run a home and small farm we both work part time elsewhere. We are members of the Victorian Dexter Cattle Breeders Association, have held positions on their committee of management, and have even been editors of the Association's newsletter.

In Conclusion

Since being retrenched I have applied for many full-time jobs in the quality control area and just about anything else that I might be eligible for, without much success. I have an Associate Diploma in Engineering, an Advanced Certificate in Metrology, in 1997 I was made a Fellow of the Australian Organisation for Quality for 20 years of involvement in the quality control field, and I have been a member of the American Society of Quality Control as part of my professional affiliations. I've done extra courses in computer applications, bookkeeping, train the trainer, running small businesses, etc.

Although it's difficult to prove, I think many potential employers now see me as an older man who has had two heart attacks and has been on Workcover, so why should they take the risk of employing me when there are younger and healthier people available? In fact that very scenario was confirmed to me privately by a professional colleague, but what can you do about it?

At present both Alison and I work part time at Safeways as well as running our own small business, Baunatal Management Services. Apart from breeding cattle, I'm also involved with contract work in farm and property maintenance, including the preparation of estimates, quotations, and tenders for a couple of small businesses with which I have been associated over several years. Life goes on.


Otto and Alison Czernik, 2006

2015 Update

Over the last decade Otto has been working full-time as a quality assurance contractor with Rockwell Australia. A re-think of work and life balance occurred when Alison was diagnosed with cancer, which was successfully treated with radiation and chemotherapy. Otto and Ali have now retired to Tasmania where they enjoy the rural life of raising Dexter cattle and are experimenting in raising Boer goats. What's a family without a few kids running around and getting into trouble? Otto and Alison have not lost their sense of humour.

Stefan Czyz: Teacher

My name is Stefan Czyz and I attended St Albans High School from 1961 to 1967. I really enjoyed being at St Albans High School throughout the 1960s. I felt that we had really high quality teachers especially in the fifth and sixth forms. They were very dedicated professionals who thoroughly knew their material. Some names that I am proud to mention - as I knew them - were Mrs Gliddon, Mr Alcorn, Mr Matthews, Mr Ziemelis, and many others. Two teachers that especially stood out were Mr Walsh, the sports teacher, and Mr McLeish. Both I can remember because they related well to the students. Mr Walsh spent countless extra hours with sports and drama activities for boys at the school. Mr McLeish was an "enigma" who related well to the 1960's type student.

St Albans High was very multicultural in the 1960s and students were generally very co-operative with and tolerant of one another, and this feature plus some very good teachers and also a very supportive general community made it a very good place to be in.

From a personal perspective I received a fair bit of kudos from my sporting and singing activities; however these became somewhat of a distraction to the main game which was getting good results. (Mine were rather mediocre.) But I learnt over my lifetime that life always goes like that - you win some and you lose some.

Coming to Australia

My parents, Ruth and Stan Czyz, migrated from Europe in 1950 travelling by ship and I remember from conversations with them that because the boat we were in (the Fairsea) was always rocking to and fro I lost my ability to walk and reverted to crawling again. It took me a further year before I decided that Australia was stable enough for me to restart my walking skills.

My father, one of five children, came from the town of Luck in far-eastern Poland, which was taken over by the Russians during the Second World War. He left Luck and ended up in Opole, where he was put to work driving German supply trucks. Working for the Germans at that time, even involuntarily, at least meant access to food. Stan recalled being a prisoner of war in both German and Russian camps.

My mother was a teenager in Chemnitz during the time of the war. Chemnitz along with Dresden and Leipzig was one of the heaviest bombed regions toward the end of WW2. The Russian forces moved in. It was a terrible time. After being physically assaulted she decided with a group of her friends to escape to a safer region and walked to Bavaria which was several hundred kilometres away.

After the war my parents became refugees in Rosenheim near Munich. My father couldn't go back to Poland because of the political and border changes on both the Soviet and German borders and the shame and guilt he felt for his own father's deportation and consequent death in Siberia. Ruth, my mother, would have nothing to do with a Russian occupied East Germany. Stan and Ruth Czyz decided to emigrate. Their choices were USA, Chile and Australia. They admitted that they knew nothing about Australia so they chose USA and Chile as their preferred destinations. It didn't happen. Australia it was to be. Many years later they confided that their move to Australia was an excellent one.

Stan and Ruth Czyz and their 18-month-old boy Stefan arrived at Bonegilla in 1950 to take residence in their allocated tin shed Nissan hut. My brother, Richard, was born in Rushworth in Northern Victoria. Eventually we moved to Taradale a small town near Castlemaine on the Bendigo railway line. For a few years my father worked around Taradale chopping trees and would ride off to his latest work site on his push bike. Later he got a job with the Victorian Railways and would sometimes sleep overnight in a railway carriage when working in places like Castlemaine and Bendigo.

I can remember in 1954 we visited Castlemaine to witness Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II pass through there in a magnificent train on the way to Bendigo. As a five year old I remember that occasion well because I dropped my little Australian flag and had nothing to wave as the Queen's train went past. I was most upset.

Coming to St Albans

The family Czyz arrived in St. Albans in 1954 and stayed temporarily with Tadek Ziola and his family in Scott Avenue. Later we moved to a wooden shack at the back of family Dobrowolski's place in Pennel Avenue and shared their back yard with their bee hives. The Dobrowolski kids included Tony, Helga,

Rose, and Roman (a huge guy), who introduced us to the delights of rock 'n' roll and Elvis Presley. We lived with the Dobrowolskis for about a year and started going to the primary school classes that were being held at the old Mechanics Institute Hall in East Esplanade.

In 1956 we moved to a bungalow at 36 Theodore Street, which became our permanent St Albans family home. The three-bedroom bungalow became very crowded when my grandmother and Onkel Johannes joined us later in 1956. Richard and I were sharing a bedroom with grandmother, "Oma", which was the only way we could all fit into our small bungalow.

Neighbours

In the late 1950s people were very social. They would frequently visit one another sharing some wine and beer, some music and some light social chat and the children easily occupying themselves with simple activities. The Bajzaks were our neighbours, as were the Mullengers. Fred Mullenger had three blocks of land and a big shed where he, as the local blacksmith, would shoe horses. He did horse shoeing for the whole district at the time, or so it seemed to us as we loved to watch him fitting them onto the horse's hooves.

The Strehlings were another local family. Eddie became a prefect at St Albans High and trained as a teacher. He became the principal at Macedon but unfortunately died of a heart attack at the relatively young age of 48. Walter, his younger brother, died even earlier, at 34 years. I believe the Strehling sisters, Katie and Bernadette, are still alive.

The Slawiczkas lived on the corner of Biggs and Theodore streets. Recently they built a lovely brand new home in their back yard for their retirement years.

Not far from us but across the railway line live Ahmed Ajayoglu. Ahmed's parents ran a chook farm opposite St Albans primary school and then they added a tuckshop to the site. It started out as a wooden shed selling all the kinds of things we the children of the '50s liked: four 'n twenty pies, lollies loose in a bag, and coke in a real glass bottle. I remember paying 1 shilling or 10c for a pie and a coke. Ahmed developed a computer programming business which he still runs today and we're still in regular contact with each other after all these years.

St. Albans in the 1950s and 1960s was a fast growing suburb with muddy dirt roads, hundreds of workers cycling to the station, families starting to own cars and those new black and white TVs and transistor radios. Open gutters (with those wiggly red worms) started disappearing with the upgrading and tarring of streets. Children made their own billycarts, bows and arrows, had rock fights, bonfire nights, and you could buy your "crackers" at the local milkbar where you could also purchase the most delicious milkshakes. Most children walked to school or rode on their single-geared bikes. St Albans was a very hands-on and vital place welcoming all groups of migrants as they arrived. In the '50s it was the Poles, Germans, Greeks, Maltese and Dutch who came plus many nationalities who followed.

Growing-up Stories

Richard and I would play a bit of cheeky sport on the way home from primary school. For example, one day we spotted Joe Ribarow walking home innocently. So we thought it was a case of "here comes Joseph, let's see what reaction we can get!" And we started following him and chanted aggressively: "Joseph little whiskers! Joseph little whiskers!" We wouldn't let up until we got a reaction. The first few days he ignored us and we teased harder and harder. About the third day he started getting really angry. That encouraged us all the more and we increased the chorus of our chanting ever louder. It continued for about a week when suddenly Joseph turned white-faced and with a surprising turn of speed he captured one of us and gave him a very red and sore ear. We decided that it just might be a good idea to leave Joseph alone.

The next day an innocent looking Otto Czernik came wandering past. "Well Otto, let's see how far we can get with you!" So off we chorused, "Otto little whiskers, Otto little whiskers," and Otto copped that for a while. Otto had something Joseph didn't have, namely a handy "swingaround" old fashioned leather school satchel which he eventually used to great effect! After Otto we resigned from our after school sports activity and just walked home normally.

Fireworks

St Albans used to have these open gutters that were up to a metre wide; they were muddy and often had long strings of wriggling red worms growing in them. Apart from smelling occasionally and bogging down a car or two these gutters provided an environment of entertainment for us young boys. Come bonfire season we thought it compelling to purchase a threepenny banger - they were like little sticks of

dynamite that you'd never want to have in your hand because when it exploded you wouldn't have a hand left - and stick it in the mud and light it. It would explode like a bomb throwing mud all over the street. Almost as interesting were the times we would throw various sized rocks up to bricksize into these mini lagoons of mud waste and water hoping to displace and disperse as much wastewater worms and mud as possible. These great lagoons of entertainment came to an end in the mid '60s after Theodore Street became a sealed road.

Would you believe that we actually celebrated British events? One of them was Guy Fawkes day and the other was Empire day. They were celebrated in May and November every year. We thought these days were fun. Often the whole neighbourhood would participate by collecting old tyres, tree branches, various bits of wood and cardboard to build up a massive structure called a "bonfire". As night fell the fireworks began. Against the spectacular backdrop of the blazing bonfire you would hear and see crackers and rockets of all sizes and shapes exploding, fizzing, whirring and sometimes unfortunately maiming. Yes there were accidents! Bonfires and crackers went together in those days, and though none of us got injured we probably got close. The poor St Albans kids of today can never have that experience because all the gutters are now concrete and crackers are illegal.

As a developing teenager I liked to play sport such as football, cricket, and tennis. I also had a bit of a go at tabletennis and athletics especially running events, however I was a very mediocre swimmer.

Singing was a passion of mine and I was gifted with a rare and deep bass baritone voice. I remember performing for St Albans High School on various occasions and I particularly remember old Mr Fehmel our music teacher training us up all year on the musical "The Pirates of Penzance" where I was to be the "Pirate King". The whole cast (there were more than 30) practised every lunchtime day in day out every available week of the school year such that I had memorized all the songs including all female parts and the total musical score when, would you know, nothing happened! Mr Fehmel simply cancelled the performance. I still have the music score with me now.

Parents' Work

As Richard and I were growing up my father (Stan) obtained work with ICI-Nobels as a boiler attendant and held that job for the rest of his working life. My mother worked in a variety of jobs. She was the manageress of Deer Park Groceries, worked in the office at Myers, then had a several miscellaneous jobs, and finally was employed for ten years as a teacher aide at St. Albans North Primary. She was active in community affairs, being the Secretary of the St Albans Senior Citizens Club for many years and President for a while. Ruth organised many of their outings and interstate trips.

[

St Albans Teachers

St Albans High was very multicultural in the 1960s and students were generally very cooperative with and tolerant of one another, and this feature, plus some very good teachers and also a supportive general community, made it a very good place to be in.

From a personal situation, I received a fair bit of kudos from my sporting and singing activities. I believe that I received a balanced and well rounded education as a result of my studies and activities at St Albans High which stood me in good stead in my future years.

I really enjoyed being at St Albans High School throughout the 1960s. I felt that we really had high quality teachers, especially in fifth and sixth forms. They were very dedicated professionals and thoroughly knew their material. Some names I am proud to remember, as I knew them, include Mrs Gliddon, Mr Alcorn, Mr Matthews, Mr Ziemelis, and many others. Two teachers who especially stood out were Mr Walsh and Mr McLeish. I can remember them because they both related well to students. Mr Walsh spent countless extra hours with sports and drama activities for boys at the school. Mr McLeish was an "enigma" who related well to the 1960s type student.

Moon Tiger Escapades

My brother Richard was a bit of a scientist. He had discovered a way of using "Moon Tiger" mosquito coils as a slow fuse for lighting crackers, so he'd attach that to the cracker, light the length of coil, put the whole lot in a letter box in the local neighbourhood and be safely home in his room when the thing exploded. Some letter boxes were absolutely demolished! Such was Richard's intent that the neighbours would gather outside, including my parents, after an explosion was heard, only to bear witness to further mailboxes blowing apart. They looked around for the offenders but could see no-one. "Oh those brazen boys are so fast!" To which Stan (our father) carefully suggested "Those crackers must have a very long wick! "Meanwhile Ruth (our mother) quietly slipped inside our house checking that we were in bed so as to allay suspicion. Yes indeed, there we were, two little blue-eyed blonde boys lying innocently in our beds. "What's the matter mummy?" we said fortuitously.

That went on for while until the neigbours started to become suspicious, for you see Richard had been diligently plying his new trade and forgot one important feature. He had wrecked every mailbox in the neighbourhood except for ours. Eventually a huge (6 foot 4 inch)

policeman was politely invited to investigate what was happening and he was subtly directed to 36 Theodore Street (our address). I was the older boy in the family and suspicion immediately fell on me, because the constable took a look at innocent-looking Richard and dismissed him as a suspect. Suddenly my (5 foot 3 inch) mother interjected aggressively "Don't accuse my children! They are completely innocent! Why only a few days ago I checked myself and they were in bed when the fireworks exploded!" Well, every person knows that you don't easily get between a female and her offspring. I knew that I was innocent anyhow and I rested my case. Nevertheless I - not Richard - was given a very stern warning that I would be kept under observation and I would be in dire strife if the problem continued. I hotly denied the allegations and didn't mention anything about my "scientific" brother.

A few nights later there was a mysterious small explosion in the letter box of 36 Theodore Street, St.Albans.

Richard now had new horizons to conquer. He was onto a good thing with his moon tiger invention and yes I pottered around with the activity as well. But Richard had a passion for fine-tuning his newfound expertise to other environments, moving from the local neighbourhood to the high school. He mentioned his crafty invention to a few of his school friends and pondered upon how it would work in the classroom. (This was the year of 1965 at St.Albans High School.)

Richard's plan was to approach one of those smaller classrooms in the arts-sciences wings that was left unlocked during recess and to set up his experiment in the waste paper bin at the front of the room. The intention was for the penny banger to explode during the lesson preceding his and for Richard and his friends (one of whom was Alex Babauskis) to have a laugh following this action. Of course this required a skill which Richard hadn't quite perfected, notably to know precisely how long it would take for the moon tiger to burn through to the wick of the penny banger. Time went by and no explosion occurred during the preceding class. The next group moved to their desks. Richard noticed that the paper bin was still smoking a little bit, but assumed or maybe desperately hoped that this attempt was just a fizzer. Everyone settled down quietly and their teacher Mr Silcairns methodically started writing on the chalkboard with his back turned towards the class. Suddenly KABOOM!!! Wastepaper rocketed out of the bin and floated all over the classroom!

Mr Silcairns, it was reported, jumped 40 centimetres into the air, was shocked, then sprinted to the outside door searching for the larrikin who'd thrown the cracker into the room! He couldn't see anyone! In the classroom, everyone was sitting there like stunned mullets! Mr Silcairns threw his hands up in despair and hurried off to get the Vice Principal. A few minutes later along comes Mister Psychology himself - the one and only - Mr Matthews, bald-headed, angry, and determined.

Mr Matthews was a bit of a psychologist and he had his special technique to get to the truth. "All right," he said, with his deepest voice, "who did it?" Everyone was silent. So out came his special technique, which was to eyeball every single person in the class as he went down the aisles repeating the same question: "Did you do it?" and of course the answer was "No, Mr Matthews." "Did you do it?" "No, Mr Matthews." He proceeded down the aisles pretty fast because he was a busy vice principal and wanted to solve the matter quickly. Matthews was heading towards Richard whose face was turning bright red. He continued to rapidly repeat his question.

"Did you do it?" "No, Mr Matthews."

"Did you do it?" "Yes, Mr Matthews."

"Did you do it?" "No, Mr Matthews."

"Did you ... Did someone just say 'yes'?" Mr Matthews was already five rows past as he turned back. "Yes, I did it," confessed a red-faced Richard.

Matthews took Richard off to be disciplined, and Mr Rayner turned up by chance and had to witness Richard being given the strap. I don't remember Richard doing any more with crackers after that. It might have been contrition, but I suspect he was trying to figure out what sized saw would be the quickest to cut down the local goalposts a few years later.

The Three Stefans - Year 1961

One upon a time there were three Stefans: Stefan Czyz, Stefan Mykytyn, and Stefan Suchadolski. This story goes back to 1961 in my first year at the high school, when Doc Walsh used to run the sport programs. We were allocated into one of four houses which competed against each other: they were called Wattle (gold), Jacaranda (purple), Waratah (red) and Kurrajong (green). In those days we had no meetings prior to the sport. We were allocated a sport at the beginning of the season and turned up for that activity on the scheduled day which was usually a Friday. One particularly nice, hot and sunny Friday the three Stefans got to talking about the weather being too hot and how playing sport would be oh so uncomfortable! The three Stefans knowing the district quite well were negotiating alternative arrangements amongst

themselves. Stefan said, "I don't feel like playing sport. Why don't we wag school and have some fun?" Now consider this! St Albans in 1961 had no such thing as a local swimming pool (Sunshine pool had just been opened). The only realistic options were the "Biggs Street" river or a pond or two. After about 10 seconds of conversation (we were good decision makers) we set off toward the old primary school near the railway line.

We continued to the pond in Margrave Street near the culvert under the railway tracks, where the McAuleys used to water their stock once upon a time and where the Pacific Can factory was later built. It was then a substantial pond, a place where generations of (mostly) boys somehow found enjoyment and entertainment in splashing about naked in the cool, often muddy waters. We had a great afternoon of swimming and camaraderie, regarding this adventure as totally justified in respect of the weather conditions and we trudged off home being totally satisfied with ourselves.

Unfortunately, I had been selected for the Wattle cricket team. The cricket captain had noticed me missing and was apparently looking for me. My absence was promptly reported to Doc Walsh, who investigated the matter. When he next saw me at school he came directly to the point: "Stefan Czyz, where were you on Friday afternoon?" I tried to suggest that I had actually been at school but participating in a more obscure sport such as softball. (You know they didn't realize that the other two Stefans were missing and that was their sport for the day so I thought that I could figuratively pretend that I was actually there.) It didn't work. I think that Harry Schultz and Ahmed Ajayoglu had something to do with it! I had to confess. Doc Walsh didn't like the fact we'd wagged school, so we were sent to the abominable Mr Strauss who gruffly meted out our required punishment. It was also discovered that, apart from us, several other lads had made intelligently inspired decisions and also disappeared for that afternoon. Doc Walsh said: "Well, we can't have pupils taking off like this so we're going to have assemblies from now on and all house-captains will have a list of all participants and these lists will be ticked off before sport begins!"

The significance of the three Stefans was that we went off and had some fun and we were the ones that caused those dreary old sports assemblies that occurred for many years afterwards.

Norm McLeish

I really enjoyed being at St Albans High School throughout the 1960s. I felt that we really had high quality teachers, especially in fifth and sixth forms. They were very dedicated professionals and thoroughly knew their material. Some names I am proud to remember, as I knew them, include Mrs Gliddon, Mr Alcorn, Mr Matthews, Mr Ziemelis, and many others. Two teachers who especially stood out were Mr Walsh and Mr McLeish. I can remember them because they both related well to students. Mr Walsh spent countless extra hours with sports and drama activities for boys at the school and Mr McLeish as an "enigma" who related well to the 1960s type student.

Mr McLeish was a "larger than life character" at St Albans High, teaching there in the '60s and '70s. He taught us English, Phys Ed, and a few other subjects. He was a dramatic individual who many years later admitted that teaching at St Albans High was a great "lesson of life" for him. One of McLeish's main characteristics was that he had a way of relating to the students very, very directly, and one way he did that was to give students various nicknames, which were often joke names. He came up to me one day and said: "Czyz, you are a 'has been'." My brother Richard came along just at that moment and McLeish turned to him: "Richard, you are a 'never wazza'."

I asked what he meant about me being a 'has been' and he replied, "You have great potential, and now you are already choosing laziness and starting to go downhill." He was referring to the fact that in the previous year (1964) I had achieved 8 firsts and a second in athletics due to natural ability but that now I was resting on my laurels and hoping to continue winning without training. He was right! By the way my real nickname was "Czyzy," and for a period of time when both my brother and I attended high school I was nicknamed "Big Czyz" and Richard was called "Little Czyz."

McLeish was a keen jogger who got into this good habit years ahead of the current aerobic fad. I trained as a marathon runner for over 20 years being inspired to start by McLeish's great example back then and, to tell the truth, his quip about me being a "has been" motivated me to excel in a few areas. For instance my best marathon time was 2 hours and 41 minutes back in the 1980s. I remember McLeish boldly challenging Joe Attard (head prefect and house-captain) to a racing duel over one mile at the time. I think Joe won.

Another McLeish story ... It was 1963 and we were in form 3a. The flavour of the week at one stage was those little wads of paper being shot across the room by elastic bands. I'd

already figured that if you didn't want to get whacked in the head by little bits of paper you made sure you got to the back seat. This particular day we came into a McLeish English lesson and I'm in the back seat ready to raise my lid, so I had good cover from the front, there was no one behind me, and from my position I could see the whole class.

Mr McLeish was late for class so we were in full flight with rubber bands and paper missiles. Barbopoulos fired a lot of long distance shots in the hope of getting someone, but his favourite strategy was get within six inches at the back of someone's neck and give them a real pazzunger: "OUCH!!!" Everything suddenly stopped when McLeish arrived, but then he turned his back on the class and started writing on the board. As soon as his back was turned a myriad of papers started flying across the room again. One piece dropped near his foot and he'd look around quizzically, but everything had stopped again. It was like a comic routine, because every time he turned to the blackboard to write something there were papers flying across the room, and when he turned to face the class it stopped. After the third round some students actually aimed at the blackboard and struck. That got McLeish going at his dramatic best.

"All right - that's enough of that! What's going on here?"

Well form 3A got the classic, full-on psychological treatment: "I didn't expect this of you. You, 3A of all forms, the elite form! How could you?" We hadn't really thought of ourselves as being particularly "elite" but his strategy worked.

McLeish collected all the rubber bands and bits and pieces and we had to swear never to do it again. Surprisingly he never gave us after school detention for that. After that episode I can't remember any more rubber band and paper missiles being used in our form.

McLeish and another teacher, Doc Walsh, spent an extraordinary amount of time doing extra curricula activities with students. Walsh was particularly good with sports organisation and especially with training the football teams. He'd sometimes shout us a milk shake after the match or take kids for a trip. McLeish would stay behind after school and help out.

I met Norm McLeish again in 1995 and visited his home in Ferntree Gully. He was living a sort of bachelor's existence at the time as his wife had already passed away. He had a son, Perry, who was about 15 years old living at home. McLeish died in about 2003.

Sex Education

We were given some introduction to sex education in our middle years at the high school, in the mid 'sixties. It would probably be more accurate to say it was about reproduction as part of biology lessons. "Big Smithy" was the one who must have drawn the short straw and was allocated to introduce the topic, and I remember him as being redder of face than usual as we filed into class, or perhaps that was just my imagination. He'd quickly pinned up a couple of large posters representing male and female components of the human body. 'This is the male reproductive system,' he said pointing to the first diagram, 'and this is the female,' pointing to the second and mentioning a few words for body parts. 'Now you know. Any questions?' And that was our sex education program for the whole year! By the way, nobody asked any questions.

Prefects: Stefan Czyz is on the right, second row from the back, 1967.

Prefects

Prefects don't exist any more at St Albans but that was one effective way of the school organising itself in the 1960s. I was a prefect in 1966-67 and we actually had specified duties, one of which was checking that students leaving the school during lunchtime had lunch passes. Males and females were segregated in the school yard and prefects enacted a kind of supervisory role. We also supervised the canteen area where I can remember a Mrs John as the manageress. The prefects were the school leaders in one sense - the leadership of the sixth formers. We would actually get together as a group and do some community activities. Maija Svars got us down to the community centre doing things with the elderly citizens of St Albans.

The male head prefect was Joe Attard whom I would quite often see diligently supervising all the cigarette smokers behind the shelter shed. I would sometimes assist younger female students with private counselling sessions around the school.

This essential service landed me quite often in vice principal Mrs Gliddon's office, having to engage in long "chats." The section between the girls and boys toilets could be described as "hormonesville" and I would quite often actively volunteer, out of the goodness of my heart, to sacrifice my personal time with assistance in this area. I'm not sure when the prefect system was phased out, but recently I

noticed their presence in "Harry Potter" so maybe there will be a revival.

Ledney's Point

In the 'sixties we had competitions with Sunshine High and Maribyrnong High in the A Grade high schools competition. We'd play cricket in summer and football in winter. The competition was pretty intense as the schools tried to defeat each other. In 1966 I was playing for the St Albans High School tennis team.

From the tennis court we could see the football field with the St Albans players in purple and green jumpers, and Maribyrnong with their gold and red. We suspected this might be a one-sided match, because our school had a serviceable and enthusiastic team who could basically mark and kick the ball and had a little bit of team work, but Maribyrnong had nearly fifty percent of their team playing in the Richmond, Collingwood, or Footscray seconds, and a couple were actual league players. Our one league player, Ray Haynes, wasn't playing, so we had just a good bunch of try-hard players.

The match progressed and Maribyrnong was scoring lots of goals. When our tennis match was finished I went over and asked how they'd gone. "It was a tough match," exclaimed Joe Attard. "They scored 36 goals and 41 points, and we scored a whole point." Do you think I cared about Maribyrnong's 36 goals? No! I had to ask the obvious question: "Who kicked our point?" It was none other than the mercurial Paul Ledney, whom I'd never thought of as a great football hero previously, but on this day he had kicked one hundred percent of our side's score. Ledney, the St Albans football hero of 1966!

The following year I repeated Form 6 and played football rather than tennis. The football team didn't improve simply because of me, but the winds of time had changed. We played against Maribyrnong again on exactly the same ground. Guess what? After a long and hard fought match we lost by the narrowest of margins. We lost by ONE POINT! Where were you Ledney?

The Best Paper Plane

I made the best ever paper planes while at St Albans High but there would be others who would dispute that. Otto Czernik was a good plane-maker and he taught me. I was impressed with his skills and asked him to show me how he did it. I followed his moves but my plane looked quite different so it became another model. After assiduous practice and applying some knowledge from physics I discovered that the heavier the paper the longer it goes. This expertise was put to good effect one year at the

Olympic swimming pool

We used to have inter-school swimming competitions and I remember that year that Juta Schwartz and Richard Szydzik were our champion swimmers. They were our best chance of getting any glory in the pool as they would be just about guaranteed to get into the top three positions against any competition. In fact Juta usually won all her events whereas the rest of us were pretty hopeless. I was way up the top with the rest of the St Albans crowd cheering our school whenever we could.

For some reason they had sheets of paper up the back and kids from another school were making useless darts that just flopped to the ground when launched. Because we were up the top there was a lot of distance between me and the swimming pool and I decided to make my special long distance dart to see if I could reach the pool. There was a bit of a lull swimming wise and I thought this was a good time to throw my dart. This one flew up and it caught everyone's eye. It floated this way and floated that way and just kept flying. After about 15 seconds everyone noticed and started cheering. Torpey looked around but he couldn't see it coming. Everyone else was cheering as it floated all the way to pool and they gave a resounding cheer when it landed in the water. I thought that was one of the best long distance planes I had ever flown because it must have been airborne for at least 40 seconds. Torpey was looking around trying to spot the perpetrator of this distraction. I just sat there quietly and kept mum.

After that at school everyone was making paper planes but none could match my achievement.

Deciding to Leave School

It was 1965 and it was towards the end of term 1. I'd completed a very mediocre fourth form, just bumbling through as probably a lot of students did with a few hormonal problems thrown in. (One of my worst results that year was a 13% for maths.) After I started fifth form I was doing absolutely nothing school-learning wise. I wasn't studying in any subject and during April I suspected I would fail because I wasn't doing anything. I felt very annoyed and uneasy about the whole deal. I was a sixteen-year-old without money who was sick and tired of not having any. So it was all about lack of money. My parents were very typical European parents, pretty tight with money and thought they were doing a good job sending me to school. One sunny morning I decided not to attend my class and to clear my head by taking a walk around the local streets thinking of what to do next. The night before I was looking through the paper and saw this really beaut job in Albion packing boxes for £10 per week. I thought of what I could do with £10 and decided to really think about it because I knew that I was getting nowhere academically at school. I was walking down the street thinking that a job packing boxes looked really, really attractive and seeing myself spending that £10 (perhaps attracting some nice "chicks") whereas

school looked absolutely unattractive, just a never- ending long, long road to nowhere. I was pretty convinced that I would quit school because I could handle packing boxes much easier than studying. But mysteriously a series of events occurred ...

We had a local policeman who drove around St Albans in a little grey Volkswagen. He saw this vagabond student walking around during class time and stopped beside me.

"Hey you there! What are you doing?"

"I'm walking around thinking," I reply.

"Oh, are you now?" he accuses me. "I don't think you are walking around thinking, I think you were intending to steal things. I think you were walking around casing places to steal stuff, and I think you've already been at it. How about you show me what's in your pockets?"

My pockets had just bits and pieces of rubbish, nothing of any consequence that would have been acquired through theft, but he drove me back to school anyway. As he walked me to the office all the students in the classrooms on two sides could see me being escorted back to school by the police. We came up to Torpey's office and there was an elderly woman waiting there.

"Mr Torpey, I caught this boy walking around the streets," said the policeman rather proud of himself.

Mr Torpey was surprisingly agitated and angry with me. "Is this the boy who was in your back yard?" he asked the lady nearby. She had a really hard look at me and said: "No, no, no. Not that boy, Not him!"

Mr Torpey was not mollified. "I won't deal with such rubbish," he said. "Go down to Mr Matthews; he will deal with you."

Deal with what? I thought. (I thought that I was merely walking around the street thinking about my very immediate future.)

The policeman left and I ended up in Matthews' office. If I thought walking around the streets thinking was a difficult task, going through Matthews' psychoanalysis session was far more difficult.

"Hello, Stefan. Sit down and make yourself comfortable."

I was definitely uncomfortable, like a trapped animal wondering what was going to happen next.

"Sit down, Stefan, and tell me your story."

So I told him my story of leaving school for a job packing boxes. This set off the alarm bells in Matthews ("I've got save Stefan!") so he said: "Relax, Stefan. You look like you've got a few problems. Tell me about them."

I had to bring my mother for an interview. "We'd better keep Stefan at school; he's got potential," said Matthews as he convinced her to give me sixty cents a week pocket money. So instead of getting £10 a week I got 60¢ a week. In 1966 that could buy me a chiko roll, a couple of dim sims, and maybe throw in a bottle of lemonade. It certainly wouldn't pull any "chicks"!

So, I definitely wanted to leave school but events conspired to keep me there. The outcome was that I ended up remaining a student for a further 8 years, finally becoming a school teacher (at age 25) and never getting out of the education system until the year 2002.

Matthews, however, was a very caring person and kept an eye out for me after that. When I mentioned that my bike wasn't working he brought half a bike from home so that I had spare parts to fix mine.

He became our language teacher in Form 6 and was very good on stories. One school afternoon he took Lindsay Chatterton and myself out to play tennis at the Sydenham courts. We had a few sets and then came back to school. That's the sort of Vice Principal he was.

Academic Achievements

I tended to like playing sport such as football, cricket, and tennis. I also liked to sing, although after puberty my burbly bass baritone voice was not suitable for "pop" singing at the time. From a personal situation, I received a fair bit of kudos from my sporting and singing activities. However, these became somewhat of a distraction to the main game, which was getting good results, whereas I've already mentioned mine were rather mediocre. But I've learnt over my lifetime that life always goes like that - you win some and you lose some.

During my matriculation years I became a prefect and house-captain of Wattle (gold) which was one of the four sporting groups at that time. The other houses were Kurrajong (green), Waratah (red), and Jacaranda (purple). I achieved some extra-curricula awards during 1966 and 1967. One of them was second prize in the state for German poetry recital, called the Goethe prize. I received special awards for my services as principal St Albans High School vocalist and for coaching tennis.

I got by academically studying English, English Literature, German, Biology and 18th Century History. I do remember Detlef Beyer recommending English Lit at the time suggesting that you only had to read books and that was supposed to be easy. I went on a very steep learning curve the following year. My academic achievements, alas, were rather mediocre.

Eventually I was accepted to Melbourne Teachers College (Primary). Our group was the first to complete the brand new three-year Dip.T. course, which started in 1968. I didn't go out teaching straight away but continued my studies for a further three years at the University of New England in NSW, majoring in Philosophy. I met my present intimate partner, Anne, at UNE, and we later got married. We both entered the teaching service and we raised four handsome

young boys: Simon, Daniel, Marcus and Ashley who this year (2006) is studying in year 12 at Sunbury College.

Stefan and Anne Czyz

Postscript

I'd been looking around to buy a few acres out in the country but not too far away from town when a friend told me about some property that was for sale in Sunbury. I came out to have a look and was impressed by the area, and on the spur of the moment made an offer. That's how we bought our few acres in Sunbury in the 'eighties and then we built our home there in that beautiful little valley location with some really old gum trees and a little creek at the bottom. And yes, we are visited by the occasional wallaby or kangaroo who thinks the grass is much greener on our side of the fence, and who could disagree with that?

At present I am 57 years young (as at April 2006). I am a self funded retiree deriving income from a variety of sources including property and shares with franking credits. Five kilometres out of Sunbury is my living circumstance on 2.5 acres of semi rural property. Of my four sons, one remains to complete his studies in year 12.

I am now a devotee of my Beloved Guru Adida Samraj and my quest for the remainder of this bodily life (and beyond) is to practice Ruchira Avatara Bhakti Yoga in The Way Of The Heart in order to become blissfully and unqualifiedly happy. My connection with Adida Samraj's Free Daist Communion started back in 1986 after reading His instructional text, "Easy Death". Now I am free to study and practice the subtler and happier points of conditional and eternal existence.

May the full state of happiness and love bliss spread to you all - om sri da love ananda hridayam!

Dace Fitton Nee Zvaigzne – Librarian, Equestrian, Thespian

My family came from Latvija, which is one of the Baltic States and is bordered by Estonia, Russia, Belarus and Lithuania. Latvija was one of the fifteen Russian Republics and in 1991 finally became a free country. Latvija's history is a troubled one and the country has usually been under foreign domination. Its area is only 64,589 square miles and 44 per cent of the country is forested. During Soviet, Padome, times, there were high levels of environmental pollution due to rapid industrialisation, and large amounts of chemicals were used in farming practices. These problems are now being tackled. The population of Latvija is around two million; Riga is the capital city, with a population of about 600,000 people.

Life in Latvia

My dad's name was Zebalds Theofilis Zvaigzne but in Australia he was known as "Ray". Mum's name was Lidija. They were IRO refugees and fled to Germany before migrating to Australia in 1951. My sister and I were born in Germany: Velga in 1946 and I in 1948.

My mother was a secretary with the State Electrotechnical Factory. It was there she met my father. Before WW2 VEF manufactured a large variety of goods, including the Minox, which was the world's smallest camera. This is why my father didn't get called up for the war because his work was important to the war effort and he was exempt from the call up. My father used to do the costings for the projects. I have a lovely love letter from him to her and mum kept it all her life because it was still amongst her papers at the bottom of the cupboard after she moved into the Latvian village.

The VEF building is still there as we went past it on one of our trips to Latvia. My father did the costings there and he was so well organized. When he started building our house in St Albans he was meticulous about documenting all the purchases and permits for the construction, kept all the receipts and noted the cost of all the materials and permits for the construction. He was always very efficient. He was also a good chess player.

My parents met in Riga, which is the capital of Latvia. Mum lived in Riga nearly all the time she was in Latvia. She was born in Mogilev, which is now in Belarus. Dad always said she was born in Russia, but at that time Belarus was part of Russia. Her father worked for the railway, he was a train driver and that's where he met and married his wife and when mum was 6

months old the family went to Latvia. In 1918 there was fighting between the White and the Red armies and mum's parents went to Latvia to escape the conflict. So mum was from Riga and dad was from Lizums which is about 330 kilometres to Riga to study. He grew up on a farm and it was a hard, country life. Because he was the youngest son they sent him to Riga to study. He would have liked to go to university but the war got in the way. He always did very well at school.

They married in 1942 during the war and we have a nice picture of them sitting together at the time in a park in Riga. Mum was one of four kids and so was my dad. Two of his brothers were killed in the war: Evalds just disappeared, Bertolds was conscripted by the Russians and died, probably in Kurzeme, Latvija, but his body was never found. Only in the 1990s, after the Russians left, was a memorial allowed to be set up in memory of fallen soldiers. His other brother, Arnolds, migrated to Australia, but did not like the heat in Perth, so he eventually settled Canada.

Leaving Latvia

The thing that was hardest for mum was leaving her family. For dad it was leaving Latvija. The beautiful green, treed countryside. He could never love the dry countryside he found himself in; he wanted the green of Europe. As well as this, he did not have much family left. As mentioned above, two of his brothers died during the war, his other brother was in Canada, his mother died probably in the late '40s or early '50s, and his father in 1958. So he had no family left. He was a fervent anti-Communist, as many of our parents were, after seeing at first sight what the Soviets could do.

Settling in St Albans

As IRO refugees we were first taken to the Bonegilla reception centre. We were there for a little while and might have been at Red Cliffs for a while and then ended up at Somers Camp at Westernport Bay. Dad was working on the railways and was around Sunshine a lot and also Newport. That's when he bought the land at St Albans and started building. He must have bought the land from the Kings because their house was next door and we shared a slight boundary. We would walk over to their place to get cream – we were just tiny kids but we'd walk over with a little jar to their back door and get cream from "old" Mrs King. We were in Kodre Street and right near the King's house. That might have been about 1951.

When we first came to St Albans we were living in a little shed at the back of the block that we later used as the laundry and bathroom. Then my dad started working on the permanent house and drew up the house plans by himself; he was a clever man. We have a photo of him erecting the building frame. After he built a half house he built on again. He did nearly all the work himself but there were times when a working bee was organized with some of the other Latvians. This was especially so with putting up wall frames and the roof because that was a difficult job for one man. Mum would do a lot of cooking and the men would come for the day to finish off the framing.

Dad could do just about anything and perhaps that was because of growing up on the farm where you had to be self sufficient. He

could build and he knew a little bit about electricity and plumbing. I think it was definitely the farming background.

Dad used weatherboard for the outside of the house, which was typical for most of the houses that were built locally in the fifties. Mum clad the building after dad died because she couldn't manage the repainting and external maintenance, but now the people who are living there have pulled the cladding off and are renovating the exterior because there are nice weatherboards underneath.

Early memories of St Albans. I remember walking to school and there being huge smelly gutters with ice on them. The roads were unmade, which was a huge thing, and I also remember playing in the streets. Another thing we did a lot was roam the paddocks – our road was unmade, not many houses, there was a creek that flooded occasionally in winter. We used to walk (my sister, Yvonne Correlje and her sister Karen, and myself) even past St Albans West School. There were some paddocks, surrounded by dry stone walls. I have a beautiful memory of wheat harvesting one summer. They used a team of about four horses, probably Clydesdales. It was such a magnificent sight. Those open paddocks have been filled with houses for a long time now.

Early School Days

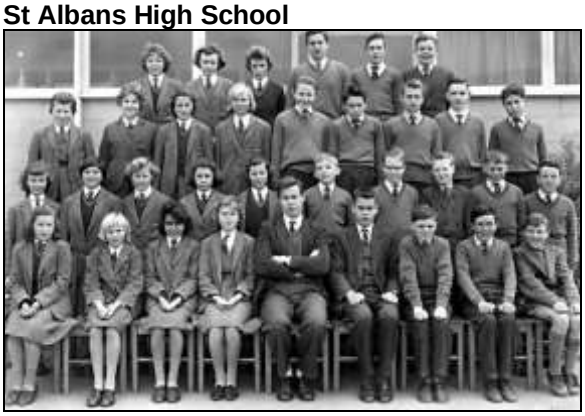
I was a very shy child, especially at primary school, and always hating it when my name came up because it was a difficult name to pronounce for the Australian people; but you get more confident as you grow older. We mostly spoke Latvian at home but mum and dad were pretty sensible and knew we had to learn English to get ahead at school. I think I could read some English before I went to school - I probably picked some up from my sister as she was ahead of me. We all loved reading at home so that was a great encouragement.

I loved horses. I had a horse for many years and that's why we moved to St Andrews to have bit of country space for a horse and we also love the environment. My daughter is also interested in horses and still has two. She joined a pony club when she was five and that was a constant activity until she was about twenty, so we spent a lot of time together around horses, especially with me towing horsefloats around the countryside. Growing up I remember going to McTaggart's riding school. That was probably just after primary school and I used to do that with Yvonne Correlje. McTaggarts used to ride up from Footscray of an early Saturday morning and they would bring up a whole lot of horses for the weekend and camp them out at Kings Road. Yvonne and I would go horse riding around the paddocks in Stevensville – at that time it was just starting to be built up so there was still some open space. We'd have a bit of a ride around the paddocks and go home. I never had my own horse as they were too expensive to keep. And my father always said having come from a country background that with having just a house block there was no place for horse – it was too much work.

McTaggart's Riding School, Main Road West, St Albans

At primary school I remember Mr Goble giving the boys a strap. They were terrible in those days with their ideas of discipline. I cried the first day I went to school and they had to call my sister to comfort me. I was very friendly with Yvonne at primary school and she was my best friend. We made up lots of stories and very imaginative games. Yvonne was in Ruth Street and we'd walk to school and walk back again. No one drove in those days. If you wanted to go somewhere you walked; your parents never took you anywhere you had to get there yourself. I remember walking along all those unmade roads.

St Albans High School



Dace in front row second from left, Form 1D, 1961

I started at the high school in 1961 and stayed there until form 5 in 1965. I did the commercial stream and never liked maths. I remember Mr Pavlov as the maths teacher and he scared me a bit. I was never good at maths and wasn't interested in doing it. Miss Tempest taught us economics in form 5. Mrs Pavlova did the sewing. Mr Scarff and Miss Butler were just fantastic. I really liked Shakespeare and the teachers made it very interesting. I have great deal of admiration for the way they taught. They took us to see plays and got us to read the play out loud. We went to see Macbeth and were supposed to meet the actors afterwards but one of them was injured during the sword fight so we couldn't meet them after all. That was at a theatre in South Melbourne.

I played hockey and really enjoyed playing; in fact I was captain of the hockey team one year. That was the only bit of sport I was good at. I was probably in year 4 or 5. My sister played hockey as well so I had a bit of a head start. We used to play for Footscray in the end. We'd take a train and walk to the ground. Later one or two of the team got a car so we could get a lift and later still I got a car. That continued for few years but stopped when I went to uni. I thought I would join the Monash team but it wasn't the same and I dropped out of hockey.

After I finished form 5 at the high school I went to work for a solicitor in the city. I was a good student but my parents didn't have very much and so I went to work. I got a job with a solicitor in town doing clerical work and it was probably one of the most interesting jobs I had. You would go to the courts and deliver things and search titles, which you don't have to do now because it's all online but at that time it was all done by hand in the titles office. I continued in the job until I went to uni and was studying part time.

I did my matriculation at University High School part time because it was close to where I was working. Then I got a university scholarship which was a great help, not that the tuition fees were as expensive as they are now. I realized that if I worked for another year I would be eligible for a living allowance, so I did that and got into Monash where I studied economics and politics from 1969 to 1971. After that I did librarianship at RMIT in 1972 and started working at the old Caulfield Institute as my first job as a librarian. I started in the cataloging department and that was fairly routine but interesting nonetheless. Thinking back, the work with the solicitors was quite interesting even though it wasn't well paid.

Travelling Overseas

After Caulfield I went travelling overseas. My sister married quite young in 1965 and she and her husband went to South Africa and then they were based in Switzerland; they were overseas a long time. I wanted to visit her because she'd just had a baby who's now forty. I lived and worked in London for six months and then did one of those overland trips back home as you could do: through Europe, Greece, Turkey, Iran Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and eventually arrived home. I was very lucky because a few years later there were all the problems with Afghanistan and Russia. You've never been able to travel that easily there since, so I was lucky I did it then. I was travelling with a group so it was relatively safe; it was easier with a group. Even then you had to be a bit careful in some of the isolated places. I was careful to be well covered and then people would respect you. You have to respect other cultures.

Marriage

I came back in 1974 and worked in Coburg State college and after that at the medical library at Repatriation General Hospital. After that I married Tony Fitton. We met at Coburg State College where I was working and he was a mature age student. We married in 1977 and we have four children: three sons Russell, Neville and David, and one daughter, Maya. Now I have grandchildren and they are a real delight. Tony was a teacher for most of his life but was always interested in jewellery. He now makes jewellery and he is part of the Open Studios in the Shire of Nillumbik. He's fascinated by old Celtic symbols and is always on the web getting new ideas for his jewellery designs.

When we went to Paris a few years ago we went to all the museums and saw many Celtic artifacts, which were really interesting. Paris is such an amazing centre for art. We had an apartment in Paris for a month so it was a wonderful visit and we had time to see more than the usual tourist experience.

We've lived in St Andrews since 1977 and love living here, but one of the obvious disadvantages is the reliance on cars for transport. When the children were young we had to drive them around. Apart from that we loved it. We have great neighbours even though some of them are not close geographically speaking.

Velga Zvaigzne

My sister Velga left the high school after year 5 and worked for a firm of solicitors. In fact she worked in the same firm that I did. She married Brian in 1965 when she was only 19. He was a metallurgist and got a job in Switzerland, so they went overseas and traveled almost everywhere. They had a wonderful life in Europe. After 25 years they came back to Australia in about 1980. They lived in Sydney for a while and then separated. She is an arts teacher. She always wanted to be a teacher and must have gone in as a mature age student in fine arts, which is something she always loved. She taught in the secondary school system but it took her a long time to get a job because there was an oversupply of teachers and it took her so long to get an appointment. She worked as sales rep for and arts supplies business and eventually started getting a few teaching jobs. She now teaches mature age students arts and fine arts at RMIT to year twelve students. She also paints. She is now separated and has two children: Brett and Lee. Velga and I are going to do the Trans-Siberian Railway trip together.

It was rather a lonely life for my mother and she did not have many friends. Her English was not very good in the early days but it improved when she eventually began to work. She was very much a family person and her life very much revolved around her kids and her husband. The family always came first. She wasn't very outgoing and that was very hard. I think the happiest time of her life was when I had my children and she was the most amazing grandmother – absolutely devoted and helpful. She was a widow by then and living at Hurstbridge. She was absolutely delighted in her grandchildren and very close to my older son Russell: she adored him. Velga had children but they were overseas so they were older when they came back.

Dad died of cancer in 1973 and mum lived till 2008. Dad started getting sick a long time ago but he never told us, and in those days you didn't tell people. It wasn't until his condition got very bad that we found out. Mum was part of the Latvian Evangelical/Lutheran congregation which had a church first in East Melbourne and then in Surrey Hills, which was a bit of trip. A lot of things were a fair way away from us and dad never drove. We went sometimes to plays and events at Latvian House, which was at Elwood. You had to take a train and a tram. And if you had something at night it wasn't easy getting back home and having to walk in the dark at night. None of us were very big on organizations; we kept to ourselves a bit. It was a hard life even though there was always food on the table and we had clothes, but there was never any money left over and if we went to the pictures it was always something special.

One thing I do remember is because dad was with the railways he would get a free ticket on his holidays, so we went on lots and lots of trips on his holidays. We'd go to the beach, and I remember going to Daylesford though we had to pay for the electric train portion of the journey. We'd go the Heallesville which was a very popular spot. There was a train that went there and we walked to the sanctuary. I can't remember anything about the sanctuary as I was just a little girl but I remember that walk because for me it was so far and I probably complained bitterly. We liked Williamstown and Sandringham beaches. We didn't go to Altona so much but Williamstown had the nice park. We also liked St Kilda. Dad didn't like the sun so much so mum would watch us girls playing in the water and he would sit down on the grass in the shade and read and wait for us to come back. We had some friends at Warburton with about 180 acres of bush and we'd visit them. They were the Mezaks and dad knew them way back in Latvia and I think we were probably in Germany together and probably also at Somers camp. It was a long-standing friendship on dad's side. There was a real old shack on the property and we'd go up there for New Years sometimes. It was really nice. There was a taxi there but we would often walk to East Warbuton and it was a long walk, about an hour and a half.

Extra Curricula Activities

Mum was very much a home body but used to work for Tom Piper in Port Melbourne where there is now some very expensive housing. She used to work there on the holidays when they had the fruit canning. It was seasonal work but in the end they asked her to stay on. It must have been funny for her in one sense because there were a lot of Yugoslav women working there and they would talk amongst themselves but mum could understand because she also knew some Russian which is another of the Slavic tongues. It amused her sometimes because they assumed she understood only Latvian. The work must have been boring but I think she liked getting out of the house and meeting people, because by that time we were out doing our own thing. She lived a pretty traditional housewife role. She never went back to Latvia: she could have gone after the Russians left but she didn't. Whether it was too emotional to go back … I don't know why she didn't. When dad died I read all her letters and her sister had written "Why don't you come back?" Once my children came she would not even think of leaving because they meant so much to her. She was very

traditional - dad was always the head of the household and that was the way it was. He was a kind man and very quiet, but you wouldn't want to cross him. He was always the head of the house.

Dace, Margaret, Barbara at class reunion, 2014.

I kept in contact with Yvonne Correlje for a while when she was in Mont Morency and she was still interested in horses so we went riding a couple of times. I have not seen a lot of her recently; she lives in Tasmania now. I sometimes get emails from Sofie Dziedzic and Boronia Mazurek who is in Queensland. Keeping up with some old friends through emails is at least manageable. After the high school's 50th anniversary, my sister met Carol Dusting, Ingrid Whitten and Leslie Grenfell and they were such good friends and they get together every few months, a few times a year.

Since retiring I've devoted more time to family history and creative writing. I joined the Diamond Valley Writing Group and some of my poetry is included in their book, there was another book by the Birrarrung Poets, and in 2011 I published a chapbook. I've been going through my mother's documents and translating the letters that she and dad received from my aunt and uncle. I've also joined the twitchers and written articles for Yarra Valley Birdlife in their publication Lyrebird Tales; these have included my sightings of birdlife in Latvia and urban birding in Paris, which I observed while overseas.

Leo Dobes: Public Servant, Lecturer, Intelligence Analyst, Research Manager, Adjunct Associate Professor, Climate Change Researcher

It's almost Christmas 2005. And Christmas happens to be the time that I promised Joe Ribarow that I would give him a minor literary masterpiece about myself. By being on time, at least I can keep one half of the promise. At this time of year, Canberra is fairly hot and dry. The heat reminds me of summers in St Albans in the fifties and sixties, when the north wind rattled the louvre windows at the back of our house, and everyone knew that another 'scorcher' was on the way.

St Albans summers were different then. At night, the brilliance of the Milky Way – due only partly to the general lack of street lights in the fifties – was complemented by the pervasive aroma of the open drains that lined the unmade roads. We lived close to the railway line at number 1 Ross Street, so we had the added bonus of a nightly chorus of frogs and crickets, especially after a bit of rain.

Emigrating from Moravia

My parents arrived in St Albans from Moravia (part of the Czech Republic) via the Bonegilla camp late in 1949 as Displaced Persons. An imaginative Immigration Department designated them as "labourer" and "house help", along with all the other new arrivals.

Dobes' home site in Beaver Street, 1950s.

Either because I was in a hurry, or because mum wasn't all that keen to have me, we didn't quite get the timing right for my own arrival in 1950. The only transport apparently available on that historic day in St Albans was the greengrocer's truck, which was commandeered to drive mum to one of the Melbourne hospitals. And so it was that I joined the human race on the Ballarat Road, somewhere just outside the old Kinnear's Rope

Factory in Footscray. But I hasten to add that our family record improved after that. My sister and brother were both born in socially more acceptable and congenial circumstances - in hospitals.

Mr Dobes building house in Beaver Street, 1950s

We spoke only Czech at home, so I was like many other St Albans children who turned up at school not understanding any English, whereas now you have the phenomenon that television and radio teaches kids before they go to school. It took me a long time to pick up the language. Moreover, Polish was the lingua franca of the street - at least in our street - where even the Kivimets kids of Estonian origin used Polish. I am thankful now to my parents for persevering with speaking Czech, in the face of some hostility and unwarranted xenophobia among people who should have known better. My own sons speak Czech, and I hope that the next generation will retain at least some knowledge of it.

It was different growing up in those days. We spent a lot of the time playing outside the house rather than inside, and of course there was no TV to watch. I remember having great adventures tramping across the paddocks with Nick Szwed, one of the kids in the neighbouring street, but you couldn't think of that happening now. I also remember being attacked by magpies on the way to school, which was just part of the Aussie environment. I remember when growing up that you couldn't have a Polish playmate on a Saturday morning, because they were all off at Polish school. I suffered on Saturday afternoons, because that's when mum made us sit down to our reading and writing in Czech.

Polish was the lingua franca in our street. Everyone spoke Polish. Even the Estonian kids spoke Polish, and so did the Ukrainians and Czechs. Somehow, Polish was the easiest to learn, which we did. I still remember phrases like 'baba jaga'. Knowing some Polish helped in later life when I was living in Glasgow with some Polish migrants, as they were my landlords. Because I could speak some Polish it helped me to get on with them.

I remember a few of the other Czech families who came to St Albans in the 'fifties. The Georgi family had a chook farm in Kings Road. We also had friend by the name of Osicka who had a little chook farm out that way. He used to make his own wine. They were established wine makers and had many vineyards back in Czechoslovakia and had been quite rich. They lost all that when the communists took over. When they arrived here they planted vines at a property near Puckapunyal, near Seymour. He also had a wine store in Werribee near the railway station. St Albans was a dry area at the time. I'm not sure it was illegal to make your own wine, but it was certainly illegal to sell locally. Osicka would bring his grapes from Puckapunyal and make the wine on the farm in Kings Road. He hid his enterprise from inspectors and people by putting sacks over all the barrels and letting the chooks run over the whole lot. There would be so much chook dirt that no one would ever want to go in there.

Mr Osicka knew old Jimmy Watson, the original founder of the Jimmy Watson café/bar in Carlton. In the late fifties my father was studying at Melbourne University, and I remember going with him and Mr Osicka to that café. They had these rickety chairs and it was really just a cosy little place for students to come and have a drink. When I came across it again in my own uni days it was a real déjà vu experience as I suddenly realised I had been there before.

The Osicka family went on to establish themselves as winemakers in the Goulburn Valley in the mid fifties, and I've read that they helped revive the wine industry in the valley. They've expanded their vineyards over the years and they still have a farm at Majors Creek, just outside Seymour. I think they've done well for themselves, and even James Halliday puts in some good words about the quality of their Shiraz.

I also remember as a young boy seeing how people tested the quality of the locally-made slivovic. We pretty much all had bare floorboards in our houses at the time. When they brought the slivovic around they used to pour some on the floor and light it to see how good it was and to see if there was any residue. I think a clear blue flame was a good result; that was the quality test.

Summers in St Albans

A real family treat in the summer was to be allowed occasionally to get on my bike and cycle up an unlit Percy Street to Unger's news agency (corner of Main Road East and Collins Street) to buy a 'brick' of Neapolitan ice cream. Wrapped in newspaper for insulation, it used to survive as recognisable ice cream just long enough to make it back to the dinner table.

Summer days were equally pleasant. With a bit of money, one could get to the baths at Middle Footscray, and, later, the new Sunshine pool. A cheaper option was a hose or sprinkler on the lawn. But my favourite was the swimming hole in the Maribyrnong river. The swimming hole was at the end of Stenson's Road. A Melways Directory indicates that Stenson's Road is now surrounded by a maze of suburban streets that I have never seen. But the river was at the very edge of existence then. To get there meant a long, dusty walk with a towel over your shoulder, or a bike ride, after passing the last houses somewhere on the southern end of Errington Road.

There was a farm house that fronted the rough cattle track that used to be Stenson's Road, but I don't recall ever seeing the occupants. (It was rumoured that Mrs Fielder, a teacher at St Albans High in the early sixties, lived there because her two daughters kept horses.) The nearest sign of civilisation, apart from the farmhouse, was the Green Gully tip. The last part of the journey was a jarring ride down the rocky hill track to the river, hoping like hell that you had adjusted the brakes properly when you last fixed your bike.

There was also a farm somewhere on the Keilor side of the swimming hole, although it was not obvious where the owners actually lived. The old German farmer sometimes crossed the rocky ford just below the swimming hole in his horse and dray, on his way to town. In season, the farmer's crossing of the river was the signal to some of the swimmers to make their way gingerly up the prickle-infested northern bank to raid the fruit orchard. Stories abounded about boys with shotgun pellets embedded in their backs and legs, so the fruit thieves were generally quick about their business.

Only once did I see the swimming hole deserted in high summer. That was about three seconds after someone yelled out "snake!!". Sure enough, a large (it looked large at the time) snake head swayed from side to side, just above the surface, as a magnificent specimen of brown or tiger snake made its way across the river. It was all of thirty feet long, by some accounts. Boys being boys, the immediate instinct was to "bomb" the snake with rocks. But the river bank offered little ammunition – all the rocks were in the river itself – and there was a marked shortage of ammunition-collection volunteers at that stage.

My good friend Ray Thurgood and I would sometimes ride our bikes to Melton to fish below the dam on the Werribee river. The ride took close to 2 hours each way, and longer if there was a north wind on the way back. We never caught anything, but the upside was that it kept us out of trouble.

One day, Nick Szwed and I made the same trip to Melton. The difference was that Nick was less patient about not catching anything. A potential engineer even then, he just had to use his time efficiently. So (and I wish to place this on record) against my better judgement, and in spite of my half-hearted refusals, we cycled on to Bacchus Marsh. Going down the escarpment brought on almost as much adrenalin as taking the curve at the bottom of the old Green Gully road at full speed. The problem was on the way back, from the then one-horse town of Melton to St Albans, with the inevitable north wind in our faces. We were so exhausted that Nick remembers the trip to this day. I'm sure he sits there with his slide rule late at night, calculating and recalculating the number of miles we travelled.

Starting at St Albans High

It was also a hot summer day when I started at St Albans High School in 1962. I had come from the Catholic primary school, and one of my first impressions was meeting a whole lot of new kids who had come from the state school, most of them from the western side of St Albans. There was a sudden mixing of kids. Even though we'd all grown up together many of us hadn't really seen each other in the school context before. The was the first big impression of high school. I remember sitting in a classroom with the sound of sprinklers outside watering the flower beds. Impressively luxurious after the fully asphalted playgrounds of the Sacred Heart Catholic School on Winifred Street (the map designates it as Reis Street now, after Konrad Reis, the parish priest in the sixties), it made me feel that I had finally 'arrived' at a genuine institute of learning.

My other first impression of St Albans High School was its intrinsically English nature. The boys had to wear caps, just like the pictures on the covers of the Billy Bunter books in the school library. The girls wore grey gloves. I'll never forget that, because it was so alien coming from the Catholic school. I never quite figured it out. That practice lasted only two or three years from the time I started. I realised later that a certain Mr Hampton who had been on the School Council or the Parents and Friends also owned the drapery shop that sold all these items. While no one ever said so, it is not hard to put these facts together. I don't know whether the teachers got sick of enforcing that policy, because wearing caps and gloves particularly in the summertime must have been pretty awful. This colonial vestige lasted only two or three years, but I still can't get over the energy and intensity with which some teachers pursued recalcitrants whose school attire was considered to be deficient. I do hope that they have developed meaningful lives since then.

The third big impression was that you had to go and get all your books at the beginning of

the year and you came out of the bookstore loaded up to the eyes holding all these books with nowhere to put them, and you didn't know what to do with them.

Then there were all the new things, like foreign languages, having different teachers for different subjects, and so on. Everyone soon adapted to that, so it was not difficult.

The Influence of Teachers

Like most people, I have fond memories of most of the teachers at the school in the sixties. They were certainly a strange mix of personalities. Some were obviously at St Albans out of conviction, but one sometimes wondered what the others had done wrong to be assigned to the wild west of Melbourne.

In my first year, there was a teacher with the illustrious name of Schiller. A German immigrant, he had what might politely be termed a thick accent. I think that he only lasted a couple of years, probably worn out by his uncaring and disrespectful charges. He had a couple of favourite sayings which he trotted out whenever the class became too unruly. In a high pitched voice that rose to an inflected climax, he would remonstrate with us by declaring that "Chattering magpies shall cease!". He was obviously trying to use Australian expressions from a German background and nobody ever quite figured out where he got these from. He meant everybody had to keep quiet. Occasionally he varied this with "Chattering ceases!" He was almost using the third person here. He was very literary and obviously knew his English literature and everything else much better than any of the other teachers there, but he never fitted in. He taught us a lot of grammar but not much English.

None of us ever quite figured out the provenance of those expressions, but I have always thought of him since then as a true, and highly original pioneer of multicultural linguistic expression. An unassuming but obviously learned man in his field of English literature, Mr Schiller sought to apply German discipline within the contextual framework of the local fauna. I sometimes wish I had got to know him better.

Form 6, 1967. Leo in middle row, second from right

Other teachers in those first years that one noticed included Norm McLeish and 'Doc' Walsh. They were good and encouraged students to be interested in their education. Everybody could probably talk to you about Doc Walsh. I didn't really know him, only through the sporting side a little bit, and seeing I wasn't a sporting type in those first few years I didn't really get to know him. He was always avuncular. I didn't get to know Doc as well as some, but he was always there, particularly for those interested in sport. Norm McLeish, bless his biceps, was much the same deep down, but was also a mixture of taciturn Scot and Iron Man. He once shared with me his theory about having to push the body to the point of exhaustion to bring out the best in a scholar. Not being keen on 50 mile runs before breakfast, then or now, I simply admired the learned gentleman (he was always carrying books around) from a distance.

From about third form (year nine today) onwards, I actually started to become interested in schoolwork. Partly because I had already spent enough of my life down at the river with Ray Thurgood, and partly because my parents threatened to end my school days (and possibly my life) unless my marks improved significantly. It was about then that I also benefited from the influence of a number of key teachers.

The other teacher that left an impression was Kevin Bett. He probably wasn't very well known as he was very quiet and often in the background, but he taught fourth form history. Kevin wasn't very well known in the school. A shy, retiring sort, he was almost monkish in appearance, with unconventionally long hair. But he taught fourth form history and managed to enthuse me, particularly because we covered Asian history for the first time in that year. One result was that I decided to join the diplomatic service, even though my father equated diplomats with liars. I even wrote to the then Department of External Affairs in Canberra, asking if they offered any scholarships. Heaven knows why, but I did. They wrote back and said no, so I dropped the idea, only returning to it later in life. In later life I did join that department, and I think the idea for that started back in Mr Bett's fourth form history classes, so he had a big effect on me. When he left the school we never heard from him again, and I don't know where he ended up at all.

Ivan Matthews was the senior master at the school and taught English Literature; he introduced me to Shakespeare, especially the Merchant of Venice. I also remember him telling us about his younger days he had worked somewhere along the Murray river, and once irritated his fellow workers as they filled sandbags in the summer heat by declaiming the opening stanza of Dorothea Mackellar's 'My

Country': "I love a sunburnt country …". The other bit of trivia that I picked up was that he had once taught a student named Gareth Evans at some country school. I well remember him saying that young Gareth was someone who would go very far one day; perhaps even become Prime Minister. It wasn't until I got to Law School at Melbourne University, where Gareth was one of the Student Representatives, that I realised that Ivan had at least been right about the drive and ambition of the future Minister for Foreign Affairs.

I think Matthews transferred to the position of Principal at Brunswick High School in the late sixties. I once tried to get somebody enrolled at his school. The kid was a Czech migrant who came out after 1968 and he wanted to go to school, but he couldn't get in anywhere. I phoned up Ivan Mathews, because I knew him, and asked if I could get this kid into his school. Much to my dismay he said no, because the person concerned did not live in the school's intake area. And much to my chagrin the next day the kid phoned me up and said he'd gone round there on his own, went to the front office, enrolled himself, and was already in the school. So I learnt my first lesson about having contacts: a contact doesn't always work, even if it is the headmaster. It was a disappointment.

Barry Rayner was a hugely positive influence in terms of mathematics in third and fourth form. His clarity of explanation, and obvious understanding of the subject matter contrasted with the rote repetition of some earlier teachers, and was truly inspirational. For the first time, I really understood and enjoyed trigonometry and calculus. But there was one frustration that was probably symptomatic of the status of the school. A few of us had finished the maths text well before the end of the year, and were eager to do more, but Barry just didn't have the material to provide us with supplementary work, as might have been the case in a private school. He tried to give us additional work, but it was not enough. Again, one wonders what might have been achieved at St Albans if students had been given more scope to develop their academic interests fully.

For me that was a distinguishing feature of St Albans High School. In a private school there would have been that capacity. Although individual teachers were very dedicated, the system wasn't set up to allow people to progress beyond the level that was normal. I still remember that to this day. There were several of us that went to special classes that he ran after school, which was amazing for St Albans. It was usually more for remedial teaching of maths and it had a smattering of people who didn't understand what was being said in class, but there were a few of us there who wanted to do extra work. He tried very hard but it just never worked out because the place wasn't set up for it. It was another big impression.

There was a teacher by the name of Gibson who taught music in my first year or second year there. What I got from her was a liking for Australian ballads. She played us things like "Riding through the Never Never" and very old ballads that one just never heard in that environment; you just wouldn't come across them. That was a very big impression on me.

The final one I wanted to mention was Maddocks, who taught physics. His standard was so much above anything we'd had that it was electrifying almost. You suddenly were really learning. He always had the answers because he knew what he was talking about.

They were the inspirational teachers.

Then there are the 'nameless' teachers. I can't even remember his name, but one long-haired beatnik type once came to our music class in second form and sang some Australian folk songs. That experience, and the Australian ballads beloved of our second form music teacher (the hauntingly beautiful 'We're riding through the Never Never' was my favourite) have been a lasting influence. By chance, I was listening recently to a record that I had almost forgotten I had. A collection of Australian railway songs, it includes a ballad about the disastrous train crash in April 1908, "at a place they call Sunshine". (The station itself was still called Braybrook Junction in those days). The Bendigo train ploughed into a delayed passenger train from Ballarat with a loss of 44 lives, not far from the Presbyterian Hall in Andersons Road where St Albans High School first began in its temporary accommodation in 1956.

The staff at the school were just as important. Mrs Wright in the front office was absolutely fantastic, very helpful, and friendly to everyone. There were the Axiaks and the Haynes who were the cleaners and people like that, who we tend to forget. They made that school a living thing, in the sense that they were always there, and they knew what was going on often better than some of the teachers. They deserve to be mentioned.

Some Negatives

Unfortunately, there was also a negative side to the school. I remember particularly a teacher

called Robertson. Apparently an Aussie Rules player who was said to have played for North Melbourne, he railed against the un-Australian behaviour of those who preferred to play soccer at lunchtime. For some time, soccer balls were banned from the school. Then there was the Sunshine Employment Service local-born whipper snapper who had been to Sunshine Tech and visited the school to offer us his professional career advice. Seemingly without being patronising, he told us that the highest levels we could aspire to were somewhere in the range of a bank clerk. Trades were highly recommended, and even railway work and the local Council were considered to be appropriate employment prospects for St Albans High School kids.

In Form 5 we had a maths and chemistry teacher who euphemistically reported sick a lot of the time, although he did complain occasionally to us of being 'hung over'. (Marin Gunew used to sing the song 'You gotta have Heart' when things looked bleak in that particular teaching department.) Some of us really wanted to succeed, so we worked through our textbooks ourselves. I usually had the answers to maths problems, and David Beighton, who went on to study microbiology (and is now a professor in London) used to come in with answers to the chemistry problems. We would make them available to our classmates, a number of whom also helped. For at least half of that year, we taught ourselves, and passed. So there was a bright side after all.

Student Leadership

Equally important was the inspiration derived from older students. Although they would not have realised it at the time, people like Helga Muecke, who got an Exhibition for Matriculation Art, Stuart Rodda who received a General Exhibition in physics, Claude Calandra who went on to do medicine, Hannelore Henschke's Exhibition in German, and Sneja Gunew who became an academic after achieving First Class honours in Matric, were all role models in one way or another. In particular, they demonstrated to us younger ones that it was possible to do well, even at St Albans High. With sufficient determination and effort, one could even match the best students in the whole State. There were others whose name I don't recall. Just the fact that they had gone off and got these prizes was inspirational because it meant we could do it as well. That was very important.

School Newspapers

It seems that the 1960s were not just the best in terms of music, but they were also prolific in terms of people trying to publish newspapers at St. Albans High School. In my early days, people like Knut Werner, Kathy Szwed, Rosemary Keegan, Lorenz Schwab, Rosemary Kiss, Ian Sharp and others were very active in producing the POE (Prisoners of Education) Gazette. I have yet to discount the possibility that Rupert Murdoch attended the school at some stage.

The decade started off with the POE (Prisoners of Education) Gazette. It included writers and editors such as Sneja Gunew and Lorenz Schwab as well as articles by the inimitable Kathy Szwed and others. I didn't normally have any money at school in those days (used to carry my horse to school in the snow, etc). Because I wasn't always able to buy a copy when it came round, I don't have a full set, but POE seems to have been published intermittently until early 1964. POE also appears to have had a degree of active support from, and possibly involvement by, the teaching staff.

I don't think that there was any more publishing activity until September (?) 1965, when Graham Neal, David Beighton and I started TROOF. The name was a spoof on the then scandal rag The Truth that was published in Melbourne, but there are overtones to 'Truth is our Plight', as some had it. There was no direct involvement by any of the teachers, so we struggled a bit.

The Gestetner stencils for the first edition were typed on my father's antique typewriter at my place, and we ran off copies on the old Gestetner roneo machine at school, but it didn't work very well, so the first edition is barely legible. (The ink in the machine drum ended up on us, rather than on the paper, as I recall.)

After the first couple of editions, Mrs Wright in the school office kindly helped by cutting the stencils for us on her electronic typewriter (the technological marvel of the day), so they started coming out better. As is always the way with school newspapers, David and I had to give up our editorial responsibilities as studies became more serious, and I ended up putting out the last edition myself in November 1966. Interestingly, the 1965 editions were 3d (3 pence) and the 1966 ones 2 cents, but I'm too lazy to work out whether we managed thereby to increase the effective price in all the confusion of conversion to decimal currency.

We became too busy after a couple of years, but others took up the challenge when Troof folded. 'Aspect' appeared briefly, thanks to Paul Fox, Len Weigh, and John Macans.

In July 1967, a group of Form 3B students, under the patronage of teacher John Grieve, produced several issues of 'The Griffen' which was edited by Marita Schreyer. The name always puzzled me because it seemed so English and out of place at St Albans High School, but I never found out how it had been chosen. Griffen obviously had staff support, but also seems to have been more serious in content and layout than its more irreverent predecessors. However, I have no editions beyond the July one (which foreshadows a

further edition on 25 August), and can only assume that this publication folded as well, probably as the school year advanced inexorably into the final exam period.

I also have two editions of Aspect, but am not sure of the year of publication. Apparently 1967 or 1968. It focused heavily on pop music and soccer results (Slavia was doing well, so that may help with the date), with a fair amount of the underground/hippy feel of the day in it. The only other clue as to a date is that David Watkins was in Form 5D, but Alba of that same year only refers to a J. Watkins in 5D. The first edition appears to have been edited by Paul Fox, Len Weigh, and John Macans. The other edition that I have has the usual plaintive note by the single surviving editor (Len Weigh) saying that the other editors had been retrenched, ostensibly due to financial problems. The reference to financial issues is matched by an apparent cover price increase from 3 cents to 5 cents.

Unfortunately, the school magazine fared less well. One edition of ALBA was produced in my first year, but it was not until my Matric year in 1967 that another was published. Although I was the editor, the production was a team effort that involved Maija Svars, Marilyn Huellet, David Beighton, and Joachim Simovic.

Editorial team for Alba, 1967

Other Activities

Even though we were fairly sheltered in St Albans there were occasions when we did get to see the outside world. It was usually at someone's initiative; it didn't just happen. One year at the school we organised an Abschol day, an Aboriginal Scholarship day. A referendum had been held a couple of years earlier to give voting rights to indigenous people. Our fundraising activity for the year was for the indigenous cause and we invited Pastor Doug Nichols to speak to the fourth and fifth formers. It was an eye opener in many ways.

Another impression of school was the career days, when people from the Sunshine Employment Service would come to advise us. It would usually be a young whipper-snapper type of Anglo Saxon, locally born. What I remember is the way they talked to us. It was almost as if the highest we could aspire to was to be a bank clerk. Basically, they said you could go and work on the railways or for the councils, or something like that. There was never any suggestion that you could go beyond that. I used to think, "Well, is there anything else?"

Then there was the non-academic side. A number of the guys would go down to the back paddock at lunchtimes. It really was a paddock in those days because there were no houses beyond Beaver Street, clear to Albion or north Sunshine. Our intrepid hunters would occasionally come back with a snake as a battle trophy. Despite all the chest beating that accompanied their exploits, I tended to sympathise with the snakes in those days because they were so heavily outnumbered. I always remember that, because it was almost like a tribal ceremony they performed together by going down to the furthest boundary of their domain and coming back with a snake or lizard. That's probably something that doesn't happen any more.

There was a guy by the name of Jim Gloftous who was a very recent immigrant from Greece and hardly speak any English; he was being looked after by George Zoumboulakis. Good football player, was George. They discovered that one of the houses on Beaver Street had acquired some goats that were tethered in the school yard, probably without permission. They decided to start milking the goats, because they knew how to do it. So Jim and George put their latent talents to work and started milking the goats at recess. Most of the milk ended up on the admiring audience that came to watch the fun. I'm not sure if the owners ever worked out why their goats produced no milk, but the menagerie disappeared a short time later. That was the atmosphere of the school at that time.

One guy that I knew really well was Pete Manic. I used to go home for lunch and one day when I got back there was a rock'n'roll band playing Poison Ivy. To this day I wonder what convinced the teachers to let them play rock'n'roll, which in those days was not a very acceptable activity in the school. The classroom was packed and the noise was tremendous. It really was nice to have. I don't know what happened to him or whether he eventually played in a band.

Broderick Smith used to play in a rock band somewhere. His brother Valentine Smith was in my class; I think he was Broderick's half brother. Valentine was very tall, and his nickname was 'The Giraffe'. Broderick was quite smaller. I remember Valentine because he spent a lot of time down at the river, as I did in my first two years at the high school. It was only when my parents told me that if I failed again I'd be out that I started working, but I think Valentine didn't.

It was naïve of me to think that I could get

away with skipping classes because my father worked at the St Albans railway station and used to see all the teachers who'd come in by train. I remember being punished quite severely because I'd been mucking around in class. In my early years I did no studies. I was a bad student. One of the teachers decided to tell dad. When I came home that night I really got a thrashing. I used to be really angry with my father for working at the railways and having such good access to the teachers. It was a bit unfair compared to the parents who just never had contact with the teachers. That was life.

I got a scholarship in fourth form which carried me through Matric. My parents were fairly tight with money at the time and it was a bit difficult because my father had changed jobs, so that scholarship was very useful.

The Social Scene

Lindsay Chatterton had a big influence on me as well, even though he doesn't know it. In the first or second term in Matric, Lindsay invited some of us back to his place after the school social. He lived on a farm in Sydenham, and had his own sleepout behind the main house. Marin Gunew drove all seven or eight of us out there in his VW Beetle without any lasting damage to the car, despite the bumpy road. Lindsay was heavily into Bob Dylan in those days, and fired my own enthusiasm that night, although I never really understood the lyrics – I was too embarrassed to ask anyone what they meant, until I realised that no-one else really knew either. But I am most grateful to Lindsay, because I was able recently to impress one of my sons (who'd seen a TV documentary on Dylan) with the fact that I possess a Bob Dylan CD. I don't usually succeed in impressing either of my sons, so Lindsay deserves a special vote of thanks.

Saturday night dances in the old Nissan Hut Police Youth Club are the other abiding memory. Peter and Bernadette Reeves unselfishly gave up many nights teaching some of us ungainly teenagers how to dance, despite having their own very large family to look after. And Lorna Cameron was in charge. Doubling as the school librarian, she seemed to be everywhere at once, knew everyone, and was totally dedicated to the kids of St Albans. Thank you from all of us, Mrs Cameron.

Tertiary Studies

When I started at Melbourne University in 1968, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I had toyed vaguely with doing forestry, or maybe languages. I was enrolled in a course that was honours economics and law, which I was doing through the Arts faculty, but after a while I dropped law and focussed on economics. I fell into it by accident. Someone in the Old Arts building loaded me up with a course that included Indonesian, economics and all sorts of things. I went to see the Professor of Economics because I didn't know too much about it. She found I had mathematics as a background and said just do economics. So I eventually enrolled in a combined Law and Arts course that included economics.

But I soon struck a problem. Because of the honours year in economics, my course was going to last something like six and a half years. However, the Commonwealth Scholarship only lasted five years, putting me in a potentially awkward financial position.

One day I went to the Department of Education office in Melbourne to plead my case. When I walked in, the person behind the office desk looked familiar. I think she had been several years ahead of me at St Albans High. Not being used to having friends in high places, I asked, "Are you Rosemary Kiss?" She said, "There were two Rosemarys in my year, and I'm Rosemary Keegan." I apologised profusely, but she was very nice and organised for me to have the scholarship for six and a half years. I don't know how she did it, but she managed to have my scholarship extended and I am eternally grateful to her for helping me out.

When I finished my course I was lucky to be able to teach at Melbourne University in the Economics Department for about 4 years. It was usual to get a tutorship and do a Masters, which is what I did. I then worked for a few months at the Institute of Economics Research which was in the same building. At that stage it was normal if you were interested in an economics career to go overseas. I was advised to go to Cambridge, but at that time I was very much in my St Albans mode and thought that Cambridge and Oxford were too snobby. I decided to go to Glasgow University because they had a specialty in Soviet economics and I was interested in the international scene, so I though this might incorporate my diplomacy interests as well as the economics. When I got there I realised that this very famous Institute of Soviet Studies was falling apart because it had been taken over by a Trotskyist cell. In fact, the leader of the Trotskyist cell was a millionaire son from South Africa who had a Russian wife. It was a very complicated story. Halfway through the year I decided to go to Oxford instead and did my doctorate there.

Working for Foreign Affairs

While still writing my thesis, I saw an advertisement for positions with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs. Like many others, I applied more in hope than with any real expectation of success (there were over 3,000 applications, but only 12 of us were accepted in my intake). I went to the usual two-day interview at Australia House in London, and at the end of it the Chair of the interview committee came up and spent a lot of time talking to me, which

worried me at the time. What I now realise, it meant he was going to support my application. I was the only one selected on that occasion. Because I had been Student President of my college (the University of Oxford is composed of affiliated colleges, rather than being a single campus), I had not progressed all that much with my thesis. I paid for my lack of diligence when I arrived in Canberra in February 1979, and I remember the gum trees and the blue sky, having just come out of the British winter. I spent the better part of that year completing the thesis, often staying up till 3 or 4 am before going to work the next day. I stayed in Canberra, partly to finish the Doctorate. Then I went back to do the examination at Oxford. They do an oral examination of the doctoral candidates and they can ask you any question, it doesn't have to be limited to your doctoral thesis. It was a bit nerve wracking but I got through that. I came back and was posted to Germany. Shortly after completing it, I was posted to Bonn, the then capital of West Germany, as Third Secretary (Political). I was responsible for the politics of immigration, not the immigration itself. I decided to leave Foreign Affairs at the end of that because I had a working wife and she wanted to go back to work, and we wanted our kids to grow up in Australia.

Settling in Canberra

My wife and I wanted our children to grow up in Australia, so I left the diplomatic service just before the end of my three-year stint in Bonn, and joined the Office of National Assessments (ONA) in Canberra, which was part of the Prime Minister's Department. It simply receives information from all the intelligence agencies. That was quite interesting work. ONA (known affectionately by some of its employees as the Office of Notional Assertions) was little known even in Canberra in those days. It is Australia's peak intelligence assessment body and reports directly to the Prime Minister. Access to all diplomatic traffic and intelligence material, as well as the freedom to analyse anything of interest, and knowing that one's reports were almost always read personally by the Prime Minister, made this one of the most interesting jobs I have ever had.

After ONA I worked for various agencies, including the Department of Defence, the Treasury, Communications, the Bureau of Transport Economics, Ernst & Young (on secondment) and Transport and Regional Services. I've taken up some part-time teaching in recent years, both at the Australian National University and Canberra University. I still haven't worked out why, except that I enjoy it.

I'm married with two kids and the whole catastrophe. My elder son is 25 and doing his masters in accounting at Sydney. In the good old European tradition that was good enough for great-grandfather, grandfather, father and me, this son is called Leo. He swears that tradition will never be continued. The younger son, Martin, is 23 and studying medicine at ANU. We deliberately spoke Czech in my parents' house, and I continued with that tradition by speaking Czech with my sons. One of my observations, and it was never scientific, was that many families who did succumb to the pressure – as there was in those days – to speak English at home often mixed up the grammar because they couldn't speak one language or the other. I think they did their kids a disservice. I spoke Czech to my kids from the start and their Czech is not that great, but they can read and write. However, I don't think that will last beyond the current generation.

My wife, Alice, is originally from Hong Kong and was working as a Senior Executive Service Officer in the Department of Defence. Her speciality has been financial, but now she has reached the magic age of 54/11. She retired recently and has just started up a consultancy.

I've come across very few other people from St Albans working in the higher levels of the public service. My sister Maria also works in Canberra. Dusan Savanovic who lived in Beaver Street is in the public service. I think his background is Turkish-Cypriot but it was a mixed marriage.

Only two other people in Canberra comparable to my level come from this area. Mike Negus is from Deer Park, and he was a senior executive in Immigration. The other one is Marilyn Childers from North Sunshine.

Although I harbour a certain nostalgia for St Albans, I have now lived in Canberra for almost a quarter of a century. My father often remarks irritably that I have become too "Canberra-like" and that I am losing touch with my roots. But I'm not so sure about that, because I have known for a long time that you can take the boy out of St Albans, but you can never take St Albans out of the boy.

Leo Dobes, 2012

David Dusting: Student 1961-66: Teacher, Deputy Headmaster

As a secondary teacher myself for over thirty-two years, twenty-nine of which I have spent at Ballarat Grammar School and twenty of these as Deputy Headmaster, my own experience as student and teacher has confirmed what the experts say: "what makes a 'good' school is the strength and quality of the relationships that exist between students and staff, and between students."

Regardless of the socio-economic back-ground of the students, the level of school resources, the academic programs, the one factor that makes the most difference in the lives of young people is the quality of the relationships that they establish with others in the School. By this definition, between 1961 and 1966, St Albans High was a “good” School.

Particularly in my senior years, it was the support, camaraderie and general youthful silliness that I shared with my “mates” that sustained me through the confusing and uncertain years of adolescence. Classmates such as Graham Snooks, Vova Karol, Henry Goralski, Lindsay Chatterton, Joe Ribarow, Pano Barbopoulos, Joe Attard, and Geoff Landers were often partners in events, adventures and ongoing in-jokes that constituted the hidden curriculum of school life. Teachers such as Mr Rayner, Mr Pavlov, Mr Maddox, Mrs Gliddon, and Father Radford, helped me gain a glimpse that life often holds more than what you immediately see before you.

Family Origins

On 9 September 1939, my father and mother were married. Within the space of days, my father played in the Springvale Football Club premiership-winning Grand Final team and with the outbreak of war he enlisted in the army. I was born in 1949, and in the ten years in between these milestones my father saw service in the Middle East, Greece and Crete, New Guinea, and spent two years in Japan as a sergeant in the British Commonwealth Occupational Forces. Prior to my arrival, this much-absent husband managed to come home often enough to father my two older sisters, Margaret and Carol. Needless to say, by 1956 this restless, returned serviceman had not managed to establish a strong basis for a prosperous civilian life and after an unsuccessful attempt to run a grocery business in Caulfield, the family was desperately seeking cheap housing which had easy access to public transport. With the aid of a war service loan, the family moved to a two-bedroom home on the corner of Collins Street and McIvor Road in St Albans. My father gained a job with the public service in Carlton and for the remainder of his working life travelled each weekday by train to the city. My mother did clerical work for William Trains and Co. in West Footscray.

Schooldays in St Albans

In 1956, I commenced Grade 2 at St Albans State School. Margaret and Carol went on to the High School in its earliest years.

In Grade 6 at the old St Albans Primary School, my classmates in Mr Ick’s all boys class were students who I went on to have long associations with through our High School years: Joachim Simovic, Peter Nowatschenko, Michael Hatjiandreou, Ahmed Ajayoglu, Graeme Kennedy, Pano Barbopoulos, and Franz Jansen were all classmates.

When I now mention names like Reinhardt Junginger, Sloco Muc, and Broderick Smith on valedictory speech nights, I wonder if the students I'm talking to think I attended a school in some strange exotic country, but they were all from the St Albans we know in the industrial western suburbs of Melbourne. These are the names of the sons of migrant families who left Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean following World War Two. In many cases their parents had simply packed their few belongings into a couple of suitcases and left their homeland in the hope of making a better life for their family here in Australia.

I explain to my students that Pano's parents came from Greece, Reinhardt’s family came from Austria, while the Muc and Czyz families came from Yugoslavia and Croatia. With tongue in cheek I explain the name Czyz is an example of pragmatic adaptation to the post-war environment, as immediately following the war there was a critical shortage of vowels in the Balkans. Ahmed’s mother was a Russian and his father was Egyptian. Even the innocuous-sounding Broderick Smith’s parents had come from England, so you can see that we were living in a neighbourhood of immigrants.

Circumstances were difficult for these families as they strove to start their lives over again virtually from scratch. They came with few belongings, earned low wages and worked very hard, often in repetitive and dangerous jobs to create the best possible future for their children.

When I think back however I look at this time with fondness and view it as a happy time. Despite the difficult circumstances of many of the students and the sparse facilities at my school, our school experience was generally a happy one, because of the positive relationships between students and staff, and particularly amongst the students themselves.

While clearly the demographics of St Albans were extremely unusual at this time, as

one of the few Australian students I was largely oblivious to the atypical community in which I was growing up. Whilst I was aware of unusual pastries, mysterious cooking smells, and strange "doonas" on beds when I visited friends' homes, I had no real sense that I was experiencing anything extraordinary at this age.

With my progress into adolescence and the increasing need to avoid being "different" it was only in teenage years that I began to get an appreciation of how unusual this community of St Albans was. I am sure that others will document the multiple dimensions of this community's differences in what they write and so I will leave this to them.

St Albans High School

The High School was only about four years old when I started there in 1961. It had only very basic facilities. There was little in the way of specialist facilities, no sporting ovals as such, no gymnasium or much in the way of extra curricular programs.

Whilst good facilities and special programs are nice to have, obviously the key to enjoyment of your school years are the relationships and friendships that are built up. Sometimes it is in a challenging environment or in difficult circumstances that the strongest and most worthwhile friendships are formed.

In my first four years at High School my friendships were conventional in that they were often transient and dependent upon personal interests and varying maturity levels. Over these years, I developed individual friendships with Robert Pope, Graeme Kennedy, Gerhard Ruffa, and Graham Snooks.

Life was filled with the formal curriculum of the school program: classes and sport. Outside school, life was filled with more sport e.g. football with the St Albans Football Club and a great deal of boredom filled as best we could with neighbourhood mates. With two working parents and, later, working sisters, entertainment was largely something that had to be provided by yourself. Adventures on the Maribyrnong River at Green Gully and the end of Biggs Street were usually the major source of stimulation.

Rebels Without A Clue

In 1965, I entered Form 5, and became included in a strong friendship group of boys based partly on similar academic programs (mainly Mathematics and Science) but also on similar appreciations of off-beat humour and, increasingly, music. In retrospect, had I been a teacher of such boys at this time, I would have classified these boys as "immature but likeable". We were rebellious but in largely harmless ways. We were primarily "Rebels Without A Clue" rather than the archetypal teenage rebels of the '60s.

Vova, Geoff, Michael, Lindsay, Joe A, Peter B, Joe R, Peter N, Graham, Joachim, Henry, Nick, David, 1965.

To illustrate the unusual nature of this group of teenage boys here are some thumbnail sketches:

We didn't smoke, rarely drank alcohol and very few had real "girlfriends" though all of us had "imaginary" ones. We took great delight in adopting the opposite position to anything that was generally popular amongst adults or fellow teenagers e.g. when the Beatles were at their prime, predictably the Rolling Stones were our heroes. When professional (aka "fake") wrestling was at its prime on television, we adopted the "bad guys" as our heroes. To the amazement of fellow ring-side spectators at the GTV9 studios in Richmond, we barracked for the anti-heroes and waved banners and signs such as "Vote 1, Doctor Tanaka". Dr Tanaka was the Japanese bad-guy wrestler set up to feed off post-war xenophobia but we weren't buying anything of this. Doctor Tanaka proved himself to be a true professional, because when he noticed our placards he turned in our direction and gave us a solemn bow – or was it that he just got "the joke" too? If there was an opportunity to demonstrate that we were wacky rebels, we'd be in it!

Escapades

Early in Form 5, various boys became aware that we were all listening to the same radio pop music program well into the early hours of the morning as we attempted to finish off our overdue school work. This awareness led to a suggestion that on the coming evening, if any one of us were still awake at 3am, we should meet at the "Coles Corner" (Main Road and Alfrieda Street). Just prior to 3am the following morning, I downed my pen, snuck out of my rear bungalow bedroom and made my way to Coles Corner to find the large majority of the boys gathered. Having surprised ourselves with such a combined act of stupidity, these rebels without a clue simply congratulated each other, turned on their heels and went home. All quite pointless but fun nonetheless.

To me, the "Coles Corner" gathering, proved to be the seed of many other pointless but often entertaining events and experiences. Directly related to "Coles Corner" was the advent of "Talk Nights". Over our final years, there were many "nights" where boys snuck out of their

bedrooms in the early hours and gathered in the kitchen of Vova Karol in Sylvester Crescent. To what purpose? To smoke, drink, steal cars? No … just to talk and play cards. Whilst most of our own parents had little idea that their teenage son was out most of the night and morning, Vova's mother knew we were coming and copious supplies of milk, fresh Vienna bread, and chocolate chip biscuits were provided and consumed. Imminent daylight signalled the time for boys to return home before being 'roused' by parents at the start of another school day.

Such experiences gave rise to the "Who can stay awake the longest" competition. A starting day was set and competitors were expected to make note of the first song played after each hourly news break on the radio all through the night to verify that they were awake during the night. Henry Goralski was declared the winner after three days of sleep deprivation, though there was nobody left on the dawning on the fourth day to verify his list of songs from the third night.

Vova was a very central participant in many events and adventure. Vova was a risk taker - his willingness to engage in reckless behaviour made him everyone's hero. He had no "principles" that inhibited his behaviour - he took everyone at face value and judged nobody. He was totally relaxed in the company of the opposite sex. In short, he was everything that I wasn't and I loved and admired him because of it. Vova could take a risk and get away with it whilst anytime I tried a gamble, it always seemed to backfire. If you were with Vova however, you gained some of the immunity that the gods had bestowed upon this immortal. I survived three car "crashes" in which Vova was at the wheel of his Falcon 500 (Inverloch, Fish Creek, and Bell Street Preston). Whilst I have the scars to prove this, Vova has none. Vova moved from his love of fast cars to a love of flying light aeroplanes and although Henry and Joe can tell tales of near death experiences with Vova at the controls, I cannot, as I wisely declined the many invitations to fly with this Icarus of the airways.

Rules and Expectations

The timetable for the October Tests must have finished on a Thursday and Form 6 were informed that they would be expected to be in class on the Friday to resume classes. The rebels without a clue and others felt this was an unreasonable requirement and so decided to boycott classes by wagging on Friday. When classes resumed on Monday, Form 6 was advised that unless the students who had been absent on Friday brought a note from their parents legitimising their absence, they would be suspended. The following day, most of the absentee students brought notes that parents had provided but some of the rebels (including me) had decided "on principle" not to ask their parents to lie on their behalf. The teachers knew why we were all absent and it would be hypocritical to say otherwise. As a consequence, we boys were suspended by having to spend the following day at school, working by ourselves out in the corridor as others continued with their classes in the classroom. Whilst nothing to the effect was said by staff, I sensed that they had some sympathy and a small degree of respect for those who chose to accept the cones-quences of their action.

In a similar spirit, there had been an agreement in Form 5 that none of the rebels would accept the position of Prefect were it to be offered to them in Form 6. I have no recollection what actually led to this pact but it was based on an opinion that the Headmaster had taken some action or made a decision that we collectively disagreed with. At the start of Form 6, when Prefect voting was completed, most of the rebels and others were offered positions as Prefects. Graham Snooks, Vova Karol and myself all declined the invitation citing various bogus reasons. In my case I declared that "because I had been awarded a teaching bursary (the princely sum of 50 pounds?) my parents were anxious that I did everything I could to pass my exams, go onto university and not have to pay the money back". In truth my parents had no real aspirations for me in relation to higher education in these times of near full employment. A day or so after it was known that some students were declining a prefectship, a teacher sidled up to me, smiled, and said: "Come on David, tell me the real reason why you turned down being a Prefect?" I smiled back and responded by giving him the previously stated party line. PS: If anyone can find out why the Form 5 rebels made the pact in the first place, I'd be interested in knowing.

More Escapades

There could be many thumbnail sketches given but others are probably better placed to provide these. To prompt others to 'fill the gaps' I provide the following checklist of nonsense:

One night, a number of boys (not including me) "broke into" the storage cupboard in the Form 6 centre trying to find a copy of the October Test questions for English by using a key made from a wax impression. Such an elaborate plan executed so professionally for so little return on just a practice exam. One of the break-in gang even found it difficult to stay awake during the exam due to his all-night escapade.

Form 6 boys were in the habit of playing cards and other trivial games in the hallway of the Form 6 centre. One such game was a form of "lawn bowls" in which a bunch of keys were substituted for the bowl and thrown/slid along the length of lino in the corridor to topple a small

pyramid of old inkwells. On one occasion, a less than coordinated Peter Nowatschenko threw his keys into the air only to smash the Frisbee-shaped light cover which still managed to stay attached to its fixture.

To support Peter, the remaining half of the light cover was quickly replaced with one from the far end of the corridor and the broken cover was placed at the end and turned towards the entrance so that staff might not notice the damage. For the rest of the day whenever one of the teachers was heading to that end of the corridor there was a student at the front of the class asking some extremely important question that needed the teacher's immediate attention. In the early hours of the following morning a human pyramid of boys (not including me) was formed outside a local furniture store to purloin a similar light fitting from above their front entrance, which then replaced the broken one in the corridor the following day. Has anyone checked whether this light cover is still there?

The rebels without a clue (including me) decided to start a Kazoo band. The one and only gig of the band was a performance at a “French Night” where we played the French national anthem and a few other French classics. None of the rebels actually did French as a subject or had any musical ability, although after the performance Broderick Smith came over and said we should form a proper band - we thought he was joking. What would he know?

Cooperation in Self Education

Due to a lack of confidence in one member of the Science staff, we came to the conclusion that we had better take the initiative and take some measures to supplement our educational experiences. This included a number of late nights making multiple copies of lesson notes obtained from a student at another school. The notes were borrowed and, like medieval monks, boys sat around Henry Goralski’s kitchen table in the early hours of the morning making multiple copies of these holy scrolls using carbon paper. The combined completed notes were then distributed to each member of the group.

Due to the inordinate number of absences of that member of the Science staff, we also had to take considerable initiative just to complete the required number of practical experiments. Students paired off as prac partners, and each pair were assigned to carry out one of the missing assignments. The results were written up as multiple copies using numerous sheets of carbon paper, and the copies distributed to the other teams for their individualised reproduction. Some will remember completing an unsupervised experiment to produce Chlorine gas that got out of hand, prompting the experimental equipment having to be carried out onto the oval to avoid poisoning all the occupants of the laboratory. Others may remember, or perhaps understandably not remember, various unauthorised experiments with Chloroform.

I’ll read with interest what others can recall of these relatively innocent but significant years at St Albans High.

After High School

After High School we went in different directions. Reinhardt Junginger left school at the end of Year 11 and by the time I was halfway through a university degree, he had made enough money from digging opals in Coober Pedy to retire and spend the rest of his life travelling the world. Sloco Muc became a dentist. Ahmed became an engineer, Pano a metallurgist. Broderick Smith went on to become a rock 'n’ roll performer and song writer in the 1970s, and now has a long list of albums to his credit. A number of the others boys studied at university and after graduation actually chose to train further in order to become teachers.

University of Melbourne

In 1967 I commenced a Bachelor of Science Degree at the University of Melbourne in Mathematics and Chemistry. Having been told to get my hair cut at Teachers College (an unwelcome repetition of a confrontation I'd already had at high school) I decided that the last thing I’d ever want to be was a teacher so I turned in my studentship and by working as a factory storeman in Sunshine and a Book-makers’ Clerk on Saturdays, I paid the money back and supported myself through university. In second year Chemistry, I teamed up with a group of nine Chemists who have remained my friends for the last thirty-seven years. Most of them became Education Department teachers and 54-11s and one is currently Principal of the Catholic Regional College in St Albans.

In 1970 I did my Honours year in Chemistry, which proved totally irrelevant to entering St. Michael’s House Theological College, in South Australia, the following year.

Marriage and National Service

In 1972 my national service call up was due and I married Janet Matthews from Geelong in January. By November I found myself in the medical corps in Queensland when Gough Whitlam said I had done enough for Queen and country and sent me home.

In 1973, with a pregnant wife and only an Army scholarship as income, I did another about face and did my Diploma of Education at Melbourne University. To supplement my income during the course, I took a part-time teaching position at Essendon Grammar teaching Mathematics and Remedial English (Remedial English being my native tongue) which led me to gaining a full-time position at Ivanhoe Girls Grammar for the following three years.

With the birth of two sons, we hit the hippy trail to a block of bushland in Smythesdale near Ballarat and set up home. There was no SEC power but plenty of trees and thousands of head of bull-ants on our own cheap bush block.

Teaching at Ballarat Grammar

In 1977 I commenced teaching at Ballarat Grammar. In 1980 we abandoned the hippy dream and moved onto the School campus with our then three sons and remained there for the next twenty years. In the early '80s I undertook the Graduate Diploma in Computing at Deakin University - one of the first online tertiary courses in the Australia. Since then I have been Head of Mathematics, Boarding House Staff member, VCE Coordinator, and at the age of 35 I was appointed Deputy Headmaster and Head of Senior School, positions I currently still hold.

Ballarat Grammar is an amazingly caring community. Over 200 boarding students are in the care of the school 7 days a week and 24 hours a day, and it has been a great privilege to live and work with young people and dedicated staff. Despite the fact that parents pay a large amount of money to have their children at the school, the kids are like any kids and have to cope with all the issues of other adolescents and often some additional ones such as the sometimes unrealistic expectations of their parents. Whilst this work is demanding it is very stimulating and rewarding to share the lives of young people. There are the great lows - the roads deaths, death of parents - but also the great highs as you see young people begin to realise their potential.

In my role as Deputy Head, a large part of my time is spent with those students that don't cope well in this or indeed in any system. Whilst for some students there is no way that they can overcome the baggage that they bring with them, there are many successes to give you the encouragement to keep being positive and optimistic about those who struggle.

In 29 years at this School strong relationships build up with your closest colleagues many of whom are very down to earth and compassionate people and include some fellow WOTYOBs (West of the Yarra Old Boys) e.g. from Spotswood and Yarraville.

Family

In 2000, Jan and I moved off campus to a two-bedroom cottage that I built myself on the edge of bushland in Nerrina. We didn't end up with a big house in suburbia so we have stayed true to our hippy ideals to some extent. We have invested primarily in our sons' education. They aren't lawyers or doctors but have grown into really nice human beings with the good priorities. None of them are married but have good friends both male and female. Matthew and Kym are currently in London and Christopher is based in Brisbane working on various creative pursuits including a hardcore punk band. They are all pursuing their passions rather than working towards fitting some mould or the expectations of others as our generation often did.

David and Janet Dusting with their sons

I still visit St Albans as my 88-year-old father and one sister still live in the area. I have always been fiercely proud of my working class roots and very appreciative of the excellent teachers who taught me at St Albans High. With no little irony, staff members and groups of our Ballarat students currently make regular trips to the Edmund Rice Centre in St Albans to provide coaching for the children of refugees. Has the wheel somehow come full circle through this service project that I had no part in initiating?

Valedictory Speeches

Every few years or so at Ballarat Grammar I am invited to give the Valedictory address at the final Year 12 Dinner and whilst I take a few liberties with detail, I always acknowledge my gratitude to St Albans High and point out that luck rather than your own efforts often plays a major part in how our life turns out. Jan and I feel we have been extremely lucky.

My generic Valedictory Speech, for those who haven't tired of this ramble from a middle aged western suburbs' old boy, includes the following excerpts:

In my youth, Australia was spoken of as the "Lucky Country". That has certainly been my experience and so too for most of my classmates at school.

Many things have changed in Australia in the last decades. Certainly for young people life has become more complex and more subject to change, but there is no doubt that this is still a Lucky Country.

A simple example of this are the circumstances of your birth. If you were born in Australia I'm sure you'll realise that you have been luckier than many people - certainly luckier than if you were born in the Balkans or Afghanistan. Lucky that you had parents who cared about you and valued education enough to make sacrifices to send you to this school.

Beyond the circumstances of your birth and parentage, in time you'll realise that there were crucial influences in your life that made the difference between where you ended up and being in a less happy circumstances.

It's highly likely that many of these crucial influences will be those that you have been exposed to here at school. Amongst these influences for some may be words spoken by Father John or your fellow students in a Chapel service or very likely it'll be the influence of your house tutor or a particular teacher. It may be as simple as words spoken or a simple act of support in a time of crisis when you were here.

Nearly all adults can give examples of the crucial influence that others have had in their life and many of these happened during their School years. (Amongst my own crucial influences, I recall my Year 12 English teacher who overlooked my appalling spelling and convoluted sentences in my essays and simply said "David, there are some very good ideas here!")

The scary thing that you will realise in later life is that luck, good fortune - or the hand of God - have played such an important part in you arriving at what will hopefully be an enjoyable future. You will realise that nobody entirely makes their own future.

My charge to you tonight is that in that time in the future, when you appreciate that you have been fortunate, that you will acknowledge this by being a positive influence in the lives of other people.

Acknowledge it by what you say about your life to others.

More important than your talk is your action. Acknowledge your good fortune by what you do for other people, for not everyone will have had the good fortune that you have had and you have an obligation to help others, for "those to whom much is given, much is expected".

Make sure that you DO something to make life a better experience for others.

David Dusting, 2005

Prof Edwin Galea: Mathematical Modeller

Edwin Richard Galea is an old St Albans High School boy who attended the school during the 1970s. The family was living in Station Street near Oberon Avenue, just up the road from the High School. Edwin's parents, Joseph Galea and Guze Spiteri, were immigrants of Maltese background who settled in St Albans in 1956. Joseph was a gifted mathematician and artist who became a ship-wright and served in the naval dockyards in Valletta during the war. He sailed to Australia in 1949 at the age of 23 under the Australian Assisted Passage Migration Scheme.

Joseph had trained as a ship builder and was indignant when the first job given him in Australia was as a labourer, so he challenged that decision and soon proved his skills. He worked in Canberra and Sydney before coming to Port Melbourne and later the Williamstown Naval Dockyard where he worked on many Royal Australian Navy ships, including HMAS Swan.

Joseph and Guze Galea were British nationals who had migrated from Malta during the 1950s and 1960s. The Maltese Assisted Migration Agree-ment was arranged in 1948 and by 1952 a total of about 12,000 people had arrived in Australia under the scheme. The peak period of immigration from Malta was in 1954–55 when over 10,000 people came to Australia. There had also been an agreement with the British government because they were closing down the naval bases in Malta and assisting the retrenched people to migrate.

The 1954 census recorded 19,988 Maltese persons in Australia, or 0.22% of the population. In 1986 the figure was 56,233 (0.4%) which was slightly lower than in the previous census. In 1986 there were 4,635 St Albans residents who were born in Malta (9.3% of the population) but it's interesting that 5,972 people were recorded as speaking Maltese at home.

St Albans High School

Edwin Richard Galea must have inherited his father's mathematical aptitude because he took to academia and mathematical modelling in the 1980s before establishing himself in London as a leading international theoretician in fire safety and evacuation dynamics. But that was

much later and the early years of schooling occurred locally.

Edwin and his older brother John went to Sacred Heart Primary School, while younger brother Paul went to St. Albans East Primary. Edwin was destined to go to the Marist Brothers College but didn't want to go there, so he was sent to the Technical School because his older brother attended that secondary school.

However, after two years at the tech school, Edwin transferred to St Albans High School and was there during the 1970s, being in Form 6 in 1975. His cousins (Stephen, Raymond and Rosemarie Galea) also attended there. By 1980 Edwin was enrolled at Monash University, where he obtained his Bachelor of Science degree with Honors and also a Bachelor of Education.

Edwin Galea, back row, left, Form 6.2, 1975

PhD in Astrophysics

After Monash, Edwin Galea moved to New South Wales to study in the Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Science at the University of Newcastle. His thesis entitled Rotating Magnetic Upper Main Sequence Stars, was concerned with the theoretical description of the magnetic fields which occur in a particular class of stars known as Ap stars (the p stands for peculiar). After completing his PhD thesis, Galea returned to Melbourne and worked for the BHP Research Laboratory before moving to the UK in 1985 to take up an appointment as a post-doctoral fellow at St Andrews University.

Fire Safety Engineering

Professor Galea is the founding director of the Fire Safety Engineering Group (FSEG) of the University of Greenwich in London where he has worked in the area of Computational Fire Engineering (CFE) research since 1986. FSEG are developers of the EXODUS suite of evacuation software and the SMARTFIRE fire simulation software.

He is the author of over 300 academic and professional publications and serves on a number of standards committees concerned with fire and evacuation for organisations such as; IMO, ISO, BSI and the SFPE Task Group on Human Behaviour in Fire.

He also sits on several UK Government committees concerned with civil defence. He has served on several major Inquires and legal cases as an expert in fire and evacuation including: the Paddington Rail Crash, the Swiss Air MD11 crash, and the Admiral Duncan Pub bombing and assisted the IMO in framing MSC Circ 1033 and 1238. His work is applied to the building, aviation, maritime and rail industries.

Since 1997 Professor Galea has trained over 600 fire and safety professionals from 38 countries in human behaviour, evacuation modelling, fire dynamics and fire modelling through a series of annual short courses he runs at the University of Greenwich. He has successfully supervised PhD and Master of Science by Research students in fire and evacuation related studies.

He is the director for the MSc By Research within the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences at the University of Greenwich and is a Guest Professor at Ghent University Belgium and the Institut Superieur des Materiaux et Mecaniques Avances (ISMANS), Le Mans, France where he teaches on Fire Safety Engineering MSc courses. He is a Visiting Professor at several universities including; Beijing Institute for Labor Protection and the Beijing Chemical University.

Professor Galea has won a number of awards for his work including;

- 1999 and 2002 Hodgson Prize from the Royal Aeronautical Society;
- 2001 British Computer Society Gold Medal,
- 2002 Queen's Anniversary prize,
- 2002 RINA/Lloyds Register Safer Ship Award;
- 2006 Royal Aeronautical Society Gold Award;
- 2008 SFPE Jack Bono Award,
- 2010 Royal Aeronautical Society Bronze Award.


Edwin Galea receiving award from HRH Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip

Edwin and colleagues with Princess Anne

2016 Update

While I have lived in the UK for over 30 years, I still have a soft spot for Melbourne and visit at least once per year, if not for pleasure for business. I have only just returned from a short 10 day visit to Melbourne to attend my father's funeral, who recently passed away at the age of 90. While I was in Melbourne I was given a copy of the St Albans Secondary College's history by a relative and have only just now spent the best part of 4 hours going through it. I hope I will be around for the 70 years celebration as I will make a point of trying to attend.

I currently have several large research projects which have a connection to Melbourne, one is with the DSTO at Fishermans Bend concerned with the RAN and another is a large EU project concerned with wild fires (bush fires) where we are collaborating with Melbourne University, RMIT and the BNHCRC, so I will be travelling to Melbourne quite frequently (I have two more visits later this year).

Also, I recently was featured in a journal which described some of my research (with a focus on my maritime applications of fire and evacuation modelling) and provided a brief history of my life, again with a particular focus on the maritime research component. You may also find this interesting. Finally, my work has featured in many TV documentaries and news programmes.

Professor Edwin Galea, 2016.

Henry Goralski: Maths Teacher

I am of mixed European background: my mother is Russian and my father is Polish. My father's family was from Warsaw and even though my grandfather worked as a mechanic, Dad told me that poverty was a constant issue in their lives. His father lived by a boom and bust mentality. When he got paid he would put on a feast on Sunday and invite all his friends to drink and dine, and then have nothing for the rest of the week.

Both my parents had experienced the war in Europe as young teenagers, because they were taken from their respective homes at the age of 14, separated from their families, and taken to Germany and forced to work in the labour camps. They were replacing the German workers that had been enlisted into the war effort. They said they had a hard time and were near starvation for a couple of years in a row as they survived by eating potato peels and finding different ways of boiling up wood trying to get a bit of flavour out of it. The significant thing I found as a kid hearing those stories was looking at my father's feet. He went from the age of 14 through puberty to the age of 18 wearing the same wooden clogs. They were issued with only one pair of wooden shoes, like clogs. Because it was winter you had to wear shoes, and what he was issued had to last him all his internment years. His growing toes became deformed and now are bent at right angles to his feet. He said it was agony to walk.

That gave me a lot of insight as a kid about their war experiences and the sacrifices they had to make. That explained why my dad started having a really good time when they came to Melbourne and he finally had a good job. I remember as a young kid seeing all the good times at home when the drink was flowing every weekend. He was actually trying to recapture the youth that he never had.

Living in Belgium

I was born in Belgium in 1948. At that stage mum and dad had been pushed around Europe trying to avoid going back to Communist controlled areas, so they never saw their families again. That was a conscious decision. They could have taken their chance with the Russians but they didn't want to. That's why they ended up as displaced persons in Belgium. The only job my dad could get was working in the underground coal mines, which was very dangerous work because mines could explode without any warning. But the pay was very good and he worked there for two years. By refugee standards I suppose they were reasonably well

off - his pay was good and they could afford a lot of the creature comforts. Then the Belgians started putting on pressure for them to move on because they were experiencing their own population issues.

Migrating to Australia

My parents saw some advertising about “Come to America” or “Come to Australia”. My dad tells me he wasn't sure what he signed but he paid the relevant number of British pounds and we ended up on a ship when I was one year old.

We landed in Sydney. Part of the assisted package deal was that you spent two years working for the Commonwealth, in the sense that they would allocate you specific work and you were supposed to stick with that. While my mother, sister and I were in a camp in Bonegilla, dad went up to Northern Queensland and started felling the rain forests to open up the land for more sugar cane. He spent great amounts of time away from us. His half sister who lived in Melbourne corresponded with us and convinced us to come down to Victoria.

Coming to St Albans

At the end of Dad's two-year work contract we went down to Melbourne and lived with his half-sister in Yarraville. Then Dad heard there was a chap from Sunshine selling land reasonably cheaply in St Albans, so he borrowed two pounds to put down something on deposit without even seeing the land. He then had to borrow more money for a bungalow, which was built with unlined cement sheet walls and an unlined roof of corrugated asbestos sheets. We moved into the unfinished bungalow and lived in that for more than three years before my parents were able to afford improvements.

I remember going to St Albans Primary School near the railway line; I would have started in 1955. Vova Karol and Peter Nowatschenko used to go there. I remember sitting on the floor of that old school and the teacher let us listen to some of the Olympic Games from Melbourne. That's a vivid memory. I only stayed there until grade two and then in grade three I moved over to the Catholic school and did my Communion.

The Sacred Heart School

In 1957 I moved to the Sacred Heart Catholic School for grade three and many of us kids who had been at the state school had their First Holy Communion that year. There was Joe Attard, Joe Ribarow, Vova Karol, John Brnjak, Frank van Kuelen of the ones I remember. It was a strange place at first because I had never experienced nuns before and they could be pretty tough, though Sister Leonard was nice. Your educational progress was judged by your capacity to perform in public, because you had to come up to the front of the class to recite, and if you didn't recite well you had to put the hand out for the traditional smack across the open palm. We had to learn our work by rote and recite it very, very well. Now that I'm a teacher I look back at that as an 'interesting' way of educating kids.

However, young lads always invent their own diversions, and the performance standard set by the boys at the Catholic primary school was seeing whether we were old enough or big enough to urinate over the toilet wall. You were considered to be a hero if you could pee over the fence against which the urinal was built. That was our milestone at the Catholic school.

The other memory I have is getting the little silver stars for every day you went to church. I used to go six days a week so I accumulated quite a lot of stars. There was always a nun sitting in every second row or such and they would give you a little nod and duly acknowledge that morning at school that you had gone to church. The only day I didn't go to church was Saturday. That went on for months and months and at one stage Vova and I were competing for the most number of stars. It was a little bit incongruous that my family were extremely religious yet I was the only one going to church and I think the others lived their religion through me. I don't know why I became the designated church goer and star getter. I often raised that with my parents as I grew older and smarter, and the answers they gave me were never quite satisfactory.

Starting at St Albans High

In Grade 6, which was my last year at the Sacred Heart primary school, I joined numerous other students at the high school for those pre-assigning tests, because there was obviously some streaming in place for the intake of new students. We went in December and were given a barrage of tests dealing with arithmetic, comprehension, spelling, etc. On the basis of your results they placed you into class A, B, or C if you were taking French, and E, F, and G for German. There were two top streams, one in German and one in French. I think that separation of students by language stream was in place until the end of year 9. It was a pity this language separation cut across the friendships that we made at primary school, though of course we could see each other in the schoolyard during recess. Though in those first years of high school old school friends didn't quite go separate ways, we did pretty much interact mainly with the kids in the same class.

Apart from the learning, it was all fun and games out in the yard and sometimes there'd be a fight. I think there a few thugs at the school, that is, kids who enjoyed fighting. Somehow, miraculously, I seemed to survive all that. I was a very small lad until year 9 and when the growth hormones kicked in I shot up to join the taller ranks.

The school athletics team, 1962

Experience of Teachers

Numerous things happened at high school to remind you of the joys of education as well as the other side. After about a week of making numerous mistakes on the blackboard and getting flustered by the numerous times the pupils picked him up his arithmetic errors, our maths teacher defended himself by saying: "Well, it's not my fault. I was a bus conductor until I came out here." He came out on an assisted passage because they had a shortage of maths teachers and must have assumed that anyone who could give change must be qualified as a maths teacher.

In the junior grades we didn't necessarily have the best quality teaching that we had later on. In the formative years we had some quirky teachers but not necessarily competently trained teachers. I remember having music in years 7 and 8 where the teacher had an obvious love of music and would be lovingly polishing her 78 RPM records before and after she played them for us. She had a collection of albums that she would play for us as well teaching us theory. It was all very much classical music and she was a real aficionado.

Lindsay was good at mathematics and some teachers either recognised that brightness and tried to push it further or saw it as a challenge that he didn't want to be pushed by anyone. There was almost a love-hate relationship between Pavlov and Lindsay, because behind that grin Lindsay was determined not to be bested by any teacher. Many a time Pavlov would say something and Lindsay would fire back. The more Pavlov dug in the more Lindsay did too. One time Pavlov got so frustrated that he aimed a kick at Lindsay. Seeing that, I thought 'We've got no redress on this, but it's wrong.' I had a fair bit of time for Pavlov, but he was a teacher of the old mould. He would often come in with a moody attitude that had nothing to do us. He would always come in immaculately dressed while we were often dishevelled and sweating because we'd been playing sport at recess. He'd tell us to open the windows. There was a lot of that going on and we accepted that pretty much.

The Doc Walsh era is one that many people will remember. He did a lot for the boys at the school, particularly in the sport, but there was another side to him.

He was quite an avuncular man in his approach to boy's sports and his very personal approach might be frowned upon these days. At the time he was this amazing character who really put sport on the map at school just through his enthusiasm and willingness to put himself out to organise competition after competition. He embedded in everyone a feeling of doing their best and in taking part in a variety of sports, most of them the traditional football and cricket. He introduced a points system for the sport houses and encouraged you to win the sport competitions and thus score points for your house. However, the boys could earn just as many points for their house (if not more) by having showers after the game as they would for winning a game of footy. That was a bit strange. Did the girls have a similar arrangement?

In year 10 we sat for the Intermediate Certificate exam, which was an eternal test though it was taken at the school. Some of the sports kids had finished as much as they could do half way through the allocated time and started talking sport to Doc, who was supervising at the front of the class. These were supposedly important exams and our supervisor and these sport students were talking out loud while the rest of us were trying to concentrate on our exam. I was extremely frustrated wondering what he was doing because I certainly couldn't concentrate. It was then I realised that sometimes Doc overdid his love for boys' sport, and that's probably why quite a few of the girls in his classes felt excluded.

Questionable Experiences

We did woodwork in year 7 and metalwork in year 8. Metalwork was a joy but for woodwork we had a real gruff fellow who didn't seem to like us. Our big introduction to woodwork was making a 15-inch ruler. I'd never used any woodwork tools before as my dad never had a workshop or tools apart from a hammer and a screwdriver. (I remember cutting the grass around the house with a large pair of scissors.) When it was my turn to use the vice and the plane I really enjoyed the nice slithery sound of wood shavings peeling away. I was so intent on watching the pencil mark on one side I hadn't noticed that the other end had slipped in the vice so that my piece of timber ended up much narrower at one end. I knocked on Chilton's office door and when he finally came out I showed him my work and said I didn't know what to do with it. He said "I know what I can do with it." He took my ruler and whacked me on the

head with it, drawing some blood, and threw the piece of wood in the bin. That was his solution.

Occasionally, the actions of some teachers were quite bizarre. One of the students was an epileptic, and you would sometimes see him on the ground going through a grand mal. One day the seizures struck him at a particularly busy time in the corridor near the main office. Several kids were looking on not knowing what to do, because he was fitting quite convulsively, when one of the tougher teachers came and gave the lad a really big kick up the bum. We were all horrified but his justification was that it would snap him out of it. This is supposed to be an intelligent person with some sort of training.

In year 8 I formed a close friendship with a lad whose father had died. Stan was a gifted sportsman and a good cricketer. During the term holidays one of the teachers invited Stan to spend a few days on an extra curricula trip to Brisbane, which Stan was quite excited about because he'd never been anywhere and his mum agreed for him to go. When he came back he was a changed boy, very withdrawn, pretty much distracted all the time, fell away in his schoolwork, and by the end of that term he left school and I never saw him again. I've often wondered why that sudden change occurred.

Commonwealth Scholarships

In Year 10 you could sit for the Commonwealth Scholarship exam that several of us were interested in doing. Our form teacher at that time was a fairly young and arrogant guy who didn't relate to us at all as a year level; he was just an administrator. I think we bored him. He made some brief passing comments about having to register if you intended to sit the exam. Quite a number of us decided take the exam and he objected to that, because there were about 30 kids wanting to register. He said that was ridiculous because on average only 6 scholarships were obtained per school and, taking into account the good schools in the state, we would be lucky to get one or two and so we were wasting our time. That's what he said. His attitude was pretty clear that we were wasting his time because he had to do the paperwork.

In fact quite a few of us did get the scholarship, I think it may have been 19, which was quite an incredible number because it was at least triple the state average. I think a lot of kids who got it were at first discouraged from even trying by this idiot who didn't want to do the paper work.

I remember those exams because they were quite challenging and tiring to do but they were also stimulating. Up until then we weren't really challenged academically.

I was pleased to get that scholarship because we had no money at home and the scholarship was the one thing that enabled me to buy my books and the family used the rest to pay bills.

Inspirational Teachers

I found there was something about the high school and the close relationship we had amongst ourselves and some of the teachers that helped us well beyond those school years. When we look back there were teachers who probably mentored us very well. There are several who were just wonderful people that did a terrific job with us, took the time, were gentle but at the same were very directional, gave good, solid advice, and were good role models. I liked Alcorn.

We had some very good maths teachers in our senior years, Barry Rayner being one of those, of course. I had a lot of time for Mr Hocking and Mr Scarff also had a bit of an effect on me. So did Mr Hart but for other reasons; he illustrated how important it is for people who take on a particular role not to let people down. Mr Maddox was a great mentor. He was a quietly spoken but very thoughtful person. I'd have conversations with him and the more you got to know him the more you appreciated he was a really genuine guy.

Mr Matthews in the short term had a great effect on me. Up until then I took language and the classics for granted but he gave me a bit a love for that. I developed a bit of a thirst for reading and finding out more about the cultural side of life. My attitude changed because people like Matthews, who was an English master, stimulated your imagination. I remember doing Julius Caesar with him. When we started reading the book it made no sense to anyone, because that style of language was unknown to anyone who wasn't familiar with Shakespeare. After a month or so Matthews took over the English class and he made that book come alive for us all. He would stop at the end of each page and explain what the language meant and we speculated what was going through the minds of the characters. In this way we discovered how cleverly it was written. By the time we finished the book I developed a bit of a love for Shakespeare. Matthews excited my imagination by acting as a translator for old English and made it understandable and enjoyable.

On the female side, Miss Butler had a soft spot for us. We also had a soft spot for her, and even though we gave her a heart attack many a time we didn't mean anything by it. We liked her a lot and would have defended her to the end if the occasion ever arose. She was also one of the ones who inspired us.

They are the teachers I'll never forget.

Year 11 Antics

Year 11 was a landmark because people who had been separated through the classes finally came together again and some important friendships then meshed, particularly amongst

the boys. We started enjoying each other's company and often mixed socially out of school. We formed a peer group that shared a lot of joy in what to someone else would be thought of as absolutely stupid behaviour. We all looked forward to going to school because it wasn't a chore or a burden anymore, it was a lot of fun. We bounced ideas off each other and we all seemed to get the joke at the same time.

We probably weren't the brightest blokes in some ways and did some stupid things at times, as illustrated in the meticulous way we planned to raid the school at night to see if we could get a copy of a trial exam paper. We managed to find something that looked like an essay topic, so some stayed up most of the night trying to prepare for that topic and went in the next day absolutely exhausted. Consequently some of the marks were worse than obtained by other kids who went in unprepared but refreshed.

By then we would be playing fairly aggressive ball sports in the schoolyard. We'd play a game called brandy which started off with one person with a tennis ball chasing 20 kids around the yard and as you hit someone with the ball they would join you chasing the others. We played that lunchtime after lunchtime. Peter Barbopoulos must have had good peripheral vision because he had the knack of ducking down just as you threw the ball. Some of us twigged to this and I was waiting for that manoeuvre and delayed my throw. By then he was coming up again and the ball hit him between the eyes. I was laughing so much I couldn't run very fast but if he'd caught me he would have torn me from limb to limb. Fear kept me out of his reach long enough for his anger to dissipate.

The experimentation with chloroform and other gasses was a phase that didn't last too long, thank goodness. At that stage we had a chemistry teacher who very often was not there, so we were often left to our own devices. One time we were preparing nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide unsupervised in the prep room of the chemistry lab. They are gasses that should only be prepared in fume cupboards and there we were doing it in a small room with the door closed. I went home with a severe headache and was coughing for three or four days later. How we didn't gas ourselves or suffer brain damage is just beyond me. We'd all heard that chloroform was used as an anaesthetic in the old days so we tried some on a handkerchief and found it would numb your senses and put you to sleep if you had enough of it. It was a stupid thing to do and, in retrospect, further illustrates that even supposedly responsible students will be tempted to experiment in more ways than one when they are not supervised.

We also delighted in preparing hydrogen sulphide, which is rotten egg gas. We had the run of the lab and we'd make the gas and put the beaker in a coat cupboard at one end of the corridor and watch as they evacuated that wing because of the wretched smell.

But most of our antics were much more innocent. Sometimes if we had a spare lesson we might be in room having a practice with our kazoos. For some reason we thought we were crash hot musicians and we all bought kazoos and imagined ourselves as an eccentric little band putting on a show for the school. The sound must have transferred down the air duct into the next room because Mrs Sturesteps would burst into room demanding that we "stop playing those combs." We actually put on a performance on some evening occasion at the school and all I remember is shoes being thrown at us, which I think was an objective assessment of our musical ability.

Apart from Vova the only other person in our midst who had a bit of money was Peter Barbopoulos. His parents had a milk bar and he worked hard but at least he had money in his wallet. He actually had a wallet in year 11, which I think was a status symbol in itself. It was nothing for Peter to saunter over to the canteen and buy himself a drink every lunch time. Being part of the gang, as we used to call ourselves, he'd feel obliged to share it and often after everyone else had taken a sip he would end up with nothing. He steadily worked through all the flavours in the canteen until he finally found one that nobody else liked - it was Sarsaparilla. He hated it too but at least he could have that without everyone wanting a sip. That was the sacrifice he had to make to enjoy a drink in year 11.

Sometimes there was a dance in the St Albans Public Hall or at the Youth Club run by Lorna Cameron. It was at Lorna's dance classes that I learnt to socialise with girls because there was very little close socialisation between boys and girls at school. There were always the few bold boys with girlfriends, but for the rest of us there wasn't much mixing. In fact the school yard was segregated into girls' and boys' zones during our stay at school. So the Youth Club was an opportunity to learn the Barn Dance, the Pride of Erin, and the Evening Three Step,

where you actually danced with and learnt to become comfortable in the presence of females. Lorna worked pretty tirelessly for the youth of St Albans in general and did a marvellous job for the kids in our school of our era.

We had to study a bit more in year 11 and someone suggested we meet at 11 o'clock just to show we were still up and studying. We'd meet and then go home and study some more. One night Vova and I were talking at his place - there must have been several of us there because we were playing cards - wondering how long we could stay awake. Vova and I were very competitive and had a bet between us. I think David and a few others were also involved. The idea was to see if we could stay up all night studying, not that you were studying much. The way we would confirm that we were still awake was to meet at the Coles corner at 2 o'clock and then go back home and finish studying, until eventually you fell asleep or decided you were sick of it and dropped out of the bet. I can remember getting from Monday to Friday without sleeping. I'd be listening to Stan Rolf on the radio struggling to stay awake and trying to do some work but probably nodding off occasionally. By Friday my ears were red and I couldn't concentrate on anything as I was just about asleep on my feet. In one of the classes that Friday afternoon I put my head on the desk for a second and by the time I woke up everyone had gone home while I was still snoring at the desk. I never did that again. That was to win a bet with Vova, and he never paid up. He never believed I had stayed awake that long and there was no way I could convince him.

Year 12 Activities

In year 12 a few students got involved in inter-school debating. The St Albans team survived the early rounds and got through to the grand final, if I recall correctly. The team was Cathy Hatjiandreou, Marin Gunew and Joe Ribarow. A few of us used to go along to the debates even when they held at other schools to support our side. The debates were interesting. In one session Joe was talking about the effectiveness of newspapers in disseminating news and opened up the Herald, supposedly at random, to show how much news it actually contained. The spot he'd chosen had a full-page Myer's advertisement with a very small news story on the back. That got a good laugh from the audience and I thought it was a winning argument for his team.

We played a lot of five hundred, which I think took the edge off our studies. All lunchtimes and any spare lessons we were in there playing cards. The first four played and the others watched. We had access to the science wing in year 12 so we had an exclusive little area that we totally enjoyed.

We were a close knit peer group but all the students in that Matric year got on very well together. The were people who weren't in my gang but were terrific people. The Hatjiandreous, for instance, were just lovely people. Cathy was like a mother to us in giving us good advice. This was about the time I had my first girlfriend and I felt so awkward I was almost scared of her. Cathy would always give me words of encouragement. It's a shame I didn't listen to more of her advice. She was a lovely person.

In many ways it's a shame they split us up again, this time into science and humanities streams. If you did maths-sciences you went into a particular English class, so in year 12 there were two English classes: the maths stream and the humanities stream. Once in a while we'd get together and have discussions initiated by teachers like Mrs Gliddon, who encouraged us to debate the maths-humanities divide. Maybe it was intended to stimulate thought but some of it fostered a somewhat artificially competitive debate that emphasised the divisions rather than the common interests. Despite the friendliness we didn't go through year 12 as a united group. We were the science boys - almost like the engineering jocks at university - this strange group, and probably by our behaviour we were a bit strange. We were certainly a very close and loyal bunch of guys and probably to outsiders we might have been seen to be cliquey. We had a real identity and I treasure that. I treasure those friendships.

Facing Expulsion

One day in year 12 we were heading off in a bus for an athletics meet with another school. Being year 12 kids we were first on the bus and headed down the back in our boisterous way. Chilton was at the front of the bus and called out "Hoy, you lot! I want you up the front, so get up the front right now!" He was being quite rude, whereas at that year level most teachers were quite polite to prefects. We walked back to the front and I'm bristling because I can hear this voice like I was in year 7 when I was being hit on the head with the piece of wood. I said "We can sit up the back. We're not hurting anyone are we?" He was standing right in front of me and gave me two sharp pokes in the chest with his index finger: "Don't you talk to me like that sonny!" I'm never an aggressive fellow but at that point I got that angry that I put my hand in his chest and I pushed him. He stumbled back and grabbed the handrail because he was near the steps. Everyone on the bus had gone quiet. He looked around the bus and said "You're all witnesses, you all saw what he did. He had a go at me."

I was removed from the bus, but they were short on the relay team so Rayner took me in his car to the meet and we had a bit of a chat along the way. The next day prior to the Year 12

assembly the principal had me in his office and said "You are going to apologise to Mr Chilton at the assembly or you are going to be expelled." There was no two ways about it and they weren't interested in my part of the story. For the first time in my life my pride nearly got the better of me, because I nearly said I'll take the expulsion. Mr Alcorn interceded and asked if he could talk with me. He pretty much said to me, "You've just got to do it. There are some things you don't do, and one of those is you don't lay a hand on a teacher. He will expel you, not because he wants to, but because he's got to make an example." He talked me round, so I had to go into a very hushed room of year 12 students and apologise. If there is anything I regret in my whole school career it is that, because I really felt on principle that I shouldn't apologise, and I should have made that issue go a little bit further. That was probably the only time I was at risk of nearly severing my school career. It was a horrible day for me.

My parents didn't know about this. In those days we took things quietly and didn't report anything at home. If you got into trouble you copped the consequences and didn't complain to your parents. I had been in no trouble at the school in six years but I was surprised at times by the lack of respect and the lack of dignity that some teachers showed towards students. I've always had the belief that you have to be egalitarian, which came from what we experienced as being migrants.

Becoming Mobile

Towards the end of year 12 Vova got his driver licence so we started going on trips to places like Bendigo or Sale. I also got a car towards the end of the year, but mine was an ancient Hillman while Vova's was a relatively new Ford Falcon. Mine was so old it consumed almost as much oil as it did petrol, and Vova always reckoned he could run faster than the car. In fact one day he hopped out of the car and raced me to the corner of the street to prove his point. He won.

L Chatterton, H Goralski, J Attard, V Karol, P Barbopoulos, D Dusting, G Landers, 1966.

After the last exam we decided to go to Bendigo to celebrate so we set off with high spirits and a couple of flagons of Sauternes. That was in Vova's car, not mine. It was a filthy night and half way there we had to stop to camp somewhere till the morning. It was all empty paddocks until we finally saw an old shed with nothing else around so we decided to stop there. We'd been sitting there a couple of hours sipping Sauternes and telling our life stories when suddenly coming down the driveway were police cars with spotlights and guys with guns telling us not to move or they'd shoot. The farmer who'd called the police listened to our story and let us stay. So that was a good ending.

Fruit Picking in Shepparton

At the end of year 12 a few of us decided that we could get a head start on tertiary education by earning the big money by going fruit picking at Shepparton. We had corresponded with an orchardist in Maroopna, and he was quite happy for us to come up and pick fruit for him. Six of us left on the train for Shepparton: myself, Lindsay Chatterton, Joe Attard, Joe Ribarow, Vlad Turok and one other person, possibly Marin Gunew, though I think he joined us later. We had these rough-as-guts sleeping bags and a change of clothes but Vlad arrived with his goose feather doona, his chest expanders, and a trumpet. Vlad was always a very cool guy, I think he was the coolest guy at school, and he obviously had a unique perception of what roughing it out in the country really meant. We slept under a bridge that night and that was enough for half the team - they left for home the next day. We'd arrived a few days early so the remaining three of us decided to look around the town for a couple of days and sleep under the bridge. We reported to the police station to say who and where we were but that afternoon a patrol car came to check us out anyway. They let us stay there but warned us that the area was prone to flooding and we should find somewhere safer. We looked at this little stream at the bottom of the valley and thought he was exaggerating just to move us on. When we returned to the spot after the rains came a couple of weeks later that valley was completely flooded up to within two feet of the bottom of the bridge, which proves you should never ignore local advice.

Anyway, we were heading for Max Hall's orchard and thinking that was just a stone's throw away we walked from Shepparton to Maroopna, which I think was about 12 kilometres. When we asked for directions to the orchard we were told "just up this road". Well, that was another 5 kilometres. Mr Hall put us up in a little sleepout out the back and next day we started some itinerant gardening because the apricots were not quite ripe enough for picking. When the picking season started we planned to start off picking about 30 cases each on the first

day. After a day's hard picking starting about 6 or 7 in the morning I think we picked about 5 cases between us. Thank goodness Mr Hall took pity on us and gave us some gardening work, because we would have starved otherwise. We talked with some of the fruit pickers who told us their life stories and we could see it was a hard life, but more importantly we learnt about resilience too. The three of us, later four when Marin joined us, also proved our determination not to be beaten. We weren't going to make much money but we weren't going to go home defeated either. We made a point of sticking it out for about four weeks until all the apricots on that farm had been picked. It was a good learning experience and we made just enough money to prove we were successful in finding work.

Melbourne University

I started at Melbourne University in 1967, where I was doing the Bachelor of Science course majoring in chemistry. That whole experience of university studies was wonderful. I loved chemistry a lot and was nearly going to stay on and enroll in the honours year, because I had a real love for organic chemistry.

At that stage during the holidays I was working at Hoechst, a chemical company at Altona. I was working there as a technical assistant trying to earn some money for my final year at university when they made me an offer to go to Germany for 12 months. I had to think long and hard about that offer, and though I declined it I often think back what life would have been like if I had gone overseas, finished my degree there, and then taken on the chemical engineering side and worked in polymer chemistry. That wasn't to be.

There was something sad about leaving uni because in many respects it was a sheltered workshop or a protected environment, where you could immerse yourself in intellectual exercises and the real world did not intrude too much at all. This was a sharp contrast to the early years of parenthood when you're the bread winner trying to balance work and family life as well the mortgage payments.

Confronting Mortality

By the time I started at university Vova already had his restricted flying licence and could take passengers, so he invited several of his friends to join him on a hunting trip. Vova, Joe Attard, Peter Barbopoulos and I hired a plane for the day from Moorabbin and Vova flew us up to Deniliquin to go pig hunting. We landed pretty much in the middle of nowhere in a sort of desert and the only sign of life you could see were some emus in the distance. Not a pig in sight. We ended up having practice shots at some old tree stumps, and that was it.

Joe Attard, Henry Goralski, and Peter Barbopoulos

When we headed back it was a clear and hot afternoon with northerly winds but then a cool change came through Victoria so we landed at Mangalore and sat in the plane until the hail storms passed. We were in the air again by 3 in the afternoon heading for home, but as we got over the Divide we were suddenly confronted by this enormous wall of white in front us. The cool change had come and all the mist and fog had started to come in, which I'd never experienced before. Within 30 seconds the mist was all round us and it was so thick we couldn't see the plane's wing tips, and it was only a small Cessna. It was like flying in milk. Vova was on a restricted licence, which meant he was able to fly by sight but hadn't yet trained to fly only by instruments, so he was trying to get us back to Moorabbin without being able to see anything.

We tried to fly above the fog but the plane couldn't get up that high. It felt as if we were flying like that for about an hour without being able to see anything and knowing that some of the peaks in the Great Dividing Range were at the same height as we were flying. It's the closest I've come to actually making peace with my maker. I thought 'There is no way out of this, I think I'm going to die.' I had made my peace and was regretting I hadn't seen my family that day, because I'd left before anyone else was up, and was thinking it was sad that I couldn't say goodbye. Suddenly through all this dense mist we could see a ray of light emerge and this tiny postage stamp of visibility opened up before us. Vova took us down through that opening and we were in a valley.

We circled and circled and circled that valley and Vova said we would have to land because the valley was surrounded by hills and there was fog above so there was no way out. We saw two paddocks which we flew past a few times checking them out for landing possibilities. We landed diagonally in the left hand paddock but didn't have quite the distance and hit a fence post. The plane was damaged a bit but none of us were injured because Vova had controlled the plane well and it was a low speed collision at the end. It was just starting to get dark, so we were lucky to have got down.

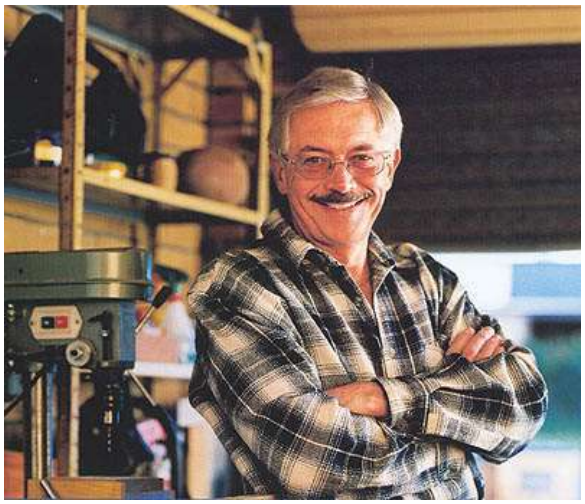
A farmer arrived and said we were lucky to have landed in that paddock because the other one was full of overgrown drain ditches that wouldn't have been visible from the air. We weren't meant to die. We had ended up over Gippsland heading towards Bairnsdale. Peter Barbopoulos had a wallet of money so he paid for the cab back to Moorabbin and we were all very quiet driving back home. That night I didn't go to bed but stayed up writing in my diary about my mortality and that for the first time ever I had accepted death as a personal possibility.

We didn't mention anything about this to our parents either. I think it was something we wanted to talk about amongst ourselves later, but we didn't. Years later my sister saw some photos I had taken of the damaged plane and she put two and two together, because she remembered me coming home that night in an unusual state.

Teaching Career

After finishing at Melbourne University I ended up training for a career in teaching and have worked for thirty odd years in that field. The years seem to have passed by so quickly, probably because they have been very satisfying years.

I went into teaching with a vocational view, and I'd like to think that over the years that I've stuck to that ideal. I've worked in the secondary school system all my career, mainly taking senior maths. I've always worked in the western region and preferred working in areas where the emphasis was not just on straightforward teaching but also involved with motivating kids who weren't easily motivated. I've enjoyed that challenge. I worked with schools in Sunshine, Footscray, Werribee, Melton, and Bacchus Marsh. Those were areas where I thought I could do more than just teaching and do some role modelling for kids.



After taking a retirement package at 54-11 not that long ago I was running my own carpet cleaning business for nearly three years. Comparing that experience with teaching is really talking chalk and cheese and I could write a book about that, but it really wasn't what I was looking for as a new interest. At that stage my son was in year 7 and one day at a parent interview I mentioned that I also had worked in the education system. The principal had been looking for teachers and offered me the role of Maths Coordinator. So, despite a brief sojourn in private business, I'm back in teaching.

Family

My first marriage ended up in divorce and it was rather tough working full time and raising two daughters on my own. My neighbours at the time were very helpful because they provided the child care until I got home. It was a challenge to come home and do the housework and then learning to do all the cooking.

My older sister, Christine, left high school as soon as she could, which was after year 10, and worked as a secretary for John Stevens. His family was one of the early settlers in the area and over the years his father had bought lots of land around St Albans. John later became a real estate agent and was selling house and land packages. The Stevens brothers also ran the successful timber and hardware store for many years. John was a highly principled entrepreneur who helped a lot of migrants and even helping out of his own pocket at times. When he sold off the last of his farmland he selected not the highest bidder but sold it to someone he knew had an affinity for the land. John passed away a couple of years ago. Christine is now with Medibank Private in the city.

My other sister Helen is with the student administration office at VUT. My brother Stan started working at the Darling Flour Mills in Albion and ended up running a mill in Perth. He died unexpectedly from a cerebral haemorrhage at the age of 32. Richard, the youngest brother, is running his own business with a delivery truck.

My parents are now in their 80s and still living in St Albans in a unit on the same block of land they bought with that borrowed £2 deposit more than fifty years ago.

Chatterton, Szwed, Goralski, Nowatschenko, 2003.

On Reflection

Many migrants who came here were starved of opportunity back in their own countries and saw education as an opportunity for their kids to succeed in life and insisted the kids take that opportunity and do the best they can. Because of my parents' experience of hardship, they definitely saw education as the ticket for their children to get out of poverty. That is why they encouraged me to stay on at school and to go on to further education.

When we were kids the Aussies, particularly Aussie adults, viewed us in certain ways as wogs. They viewed us with suspicion. Because we were new to the country and often didn't have a lot of things we were viewed as the underclass and the underprivileged. Our parents had to start from scratch and often had to make large personal loan repayments. We didn't live flash. For years and years we lived in a three-room bungalow that wasn't even lined. We were a bit of an underclass at that time and that was part of my upbringing. I think some teachers had that attitude about us. Very few teachers went to the bother of trying to pronounce our surnames correctly. Some would butcher our names and they didn't care. In the end I got tired of trying to correct the pronunciation of my name.

But by the time I was in Year 12 I'd pretty much formed the opinion that I was as good as anyone else. The fact that we'd got all those scholarships in year 10 proved to me that we were as good as anyone, and just because we lived in St Albans or had a particular type of surname ...

My overall impression is that there were many other students in situations similar to mine that went through St Albans High and some of the talent and the calibre of the students that graduated from there is as good as from anywhere else. We have had a number of very high achievers though their early origins may not be obvious. The diversity of nationalities at the school was just wonderful and to have all those people melded together, the different cultures we all brought with us, settling into a functioning community was a very successful experience.

To me, the important things that happened to me in my formative years happened at school, and what I did later in life was because of what had formed me at St Albans High School.

Henry Goralski, 2005.

.

Marin Gunew: Conscientious Objector, Enlightened Misfit

We came to St Albans in 1951 from Germany. My parents were Dimiter and Ursula Gunew and my sister was Sneja. It so happened that one of my mother's great uncles - my mother came from a very old, titled family in Germany called von Stein - was living in St Albans. The great uncle was Wilhelm von Stein, who called himself Willy Stein over here. He was actually one of the pioneering farmers in the sugar industry up in Bundaberg, but that didn't work out for him. His daughter lived in St Albans, and her name is Mary Smith. It was through these relatives that we came to Melbourne. The connection was part of the good fortune of coming from a well-connected, long-established, European family that had tentacles all over the place, so to speak.

My father got a position with ICI as a research chemist even before he left Germany, because that's what he was, a research chemist.

We originally stayed with Willy Stein's son, who lived in North Balwyn. Through Mary's husband, Eric Smith, we bought a block of land in St Albans on the corner of Oberon and Station avenues. My father sold some chemical glassware he had brought out from Germany to his employer (ICI) and with that money built the first two-and-a-half rooms of our house.

I turned two on the journey to Australia, so I was about two-and-a-half when we came to St Albans and I have very early memories. A lot of things that are now considered old history were considered brand new.

Early Memories

In those days there was lots of space; you could see from our house all the way to the railway track. You could see all the old steam-driven wheat trains coming down the track.

One of my earliest memories is the milkie coming round; this was the days before the use of milk bottles. He used to come with a horse and dray and a one-pint ladle, and you'd go out with your container and he'd scoop out the number of pints that you wanted.

My images of the early days was the wide open spaces, the opportunity, the freedom, the ability to be a kid. It didn't provide anything that wasn't there but it tempered the whole lot into a workable alloy. There was a sense of community - not the artificial, highly organised community that is engineered these days, but the genuine, spontaneous interaction of people. I remember one windy day my mother was struggling to take

down the washing from the line when the two Self brothers happened to be passing by doing their deliveries. They just hopped out of the truck and helped her bring the washing in.

These were also the days when things weren't available. European-style delicatessens were not available, so getting capsicums, eggplant, and even olive oil was a real fight. Consequently, you'd have some enterprising chaps coming round selling this type of goods from the back of their car. These hawkers, as they were known, were not popular with the Traders Association, because they claimed it took business away from local suppliers. There may have been a bylaw prohibiting hawkers, but if that was the only way to get the food you were accustomed to, then people thought so be it.

I always consider myself to be incredibly fortunate that I was able to see the dying days of a different era before we came into the opulence of the '50s and then the cyber space of the '05s.

My Father

My father, Dimiter Stefanov Gunew, was fortunate, in so far as he had a fairly high degree from the technical university in Munich. When he applied for his qualifications to be recognised at the university here, they would not acknowledge his degree at all. When asked at the interview, he said his qualifications were at least equivalent to a Master of Science. They laughed at him and said he'd be lucky if they recognised him as a Bachelor. But he applied to the Royal Australian Chemical Institute, which was the governing body of work in chemistry at the time. Some weeks later a letter arrived at our place recognising him as a Master of Science. That was the calibre of his work.

He became a research associate with ICI and he spent the rest of his working life there working on analytical chemistry, pushing the limits of many of their so-called forensic and bio-genetic advances that have been made over the years due to techniques that were pioneered by my father and other people. He worked in a field called chroma-tography, which is a very, very high quality method of analysis used in many different fields. ICI still holds some patents that he developed.

My father died in 1980 at the age of 60. He was looking forward to he imminent retirement, and had a little property in Healesville all ready, when he passed away.

My Mother

My mother, Ula Zimmerman, was born in Berlin but ended up in Munich after the war. She was already a trained medical lab technician and radiographer when we came to Australia. She worked most of her life in the paramedic field of x-rays with the TB bureau, which no longer exists, then with private practices, then in 1958 she changed over to the new field of electroencephalography, which is monitoring the electrical impulses between various areas of the brain and from the wave shapes generated determining the presence of epilepsy, the focus of abscesses, tumours, etc.

She ended up as head of the unit at the Childrens Hospital prior to retiring.

Both my parents were fortunate in that they worked in the fields for which they had trained overseas. A good friend of the family, Nick Bojadjieff, who called himself Nick Boyd in later years because Bojadjieff was a little bit too much for the Anglo tongue, was a qualified mechanical engineer. He ended up making wrought iron gates for all and sundry because his qualifications were not recognised. Things like that were not uncommon.

Primary School

I started school in 1955 at the old school near the railway line. Then, at the start of 1956, I was one of the first students to go to the St Albans East Primary. I was already showing signs of being somewhat of a difficult ... troublesome ... troublemaker ... whatever have you. I was having trouble at school, which boiled down to three things.

Firstly, I was dyslexic. In the 'fifties people didn't know what dyslexia was, so I was continuously in trouble because my work looked like a dog's breakfast. I had no idea of spelling.

At the same time I was gifted with an inquiring and fairly agile mind. I had this mania for "looking with my fingers" as my parents used to say, which inevitably meant I broke a lot of things before I figured out how to put them back together again.

Furthermore, primary school wasn't a fun time for me, because it was not where my head was at. My head was out in the paddocks, looking at bits of machinery, figuring out how things worked, going exploring in the bluestone ruins along the Maribyrnong creek.

High School

After primary school I was sent to a little school called Sunshine Boys College. The head was a guy called R.T. Connelly. He was interested in science and languages, and ended up lecturing in the University of Palermo in Italy and became a major international figure as a Latin scholar.

Connelly recognised my curious nature, my mania for understanding how things worked, and he gave me free reign of the library.

I came to St Albans High School in 1964 - fourth form. I found the independence that I had developed at the boys college held me in good stead, in so far as I could read who was the big banana that had to be listened to, and who was just throwing their weight around.

School was always something that had to be serviced but got in the way of living. I pretty much did my own thing, which in those days was electronics, radios, short wave. I had had an

interest in knowing what other people were doing in other parts of the world since I was knee high to a grass hopper. I got my first crystal set when I was in third grade. The first thing I did - much to my parents' frustration - was to rip it apart and put it back together again, just so that I could see how it worked.

Later I played terrible practical jokes. I would wire a speaker into our letterbox, which was out on the front fence near the corner bus stop. So, on a cold and dark winter's morning the Voice of America would suddenly start broadcasting from this letterbox and the people waiting for the bus would all be looking around wondering what was happening. That was my perverse sense of humour. These experiments resulted in me becoming proficient in wiring microphones and speakers.

I also realised in my early days of high school that I had a fairly innate sense for mathematics, so it was easy for me to work things out. I used to just remember the basics and worked things out as I needed to, which frustrated people no end. I never studied.

I became involved with the debating team during fifth form, which was also a good learning experience. As I recall there were Cathy Hatjiandreou and Joe Ribarow as well as myself, encouraged by Miss Butler, Mrs Gliddon, and another teacher whose name I've forgotten. Over the next couple of years there were some fairly intense theological debates with Val Noone. He started off by giving the standard religious instruction responses, but we were more interested in some of the esoteric theological arguments and ended up engaging with him at that level. The constant debates created some fairly self-sufficient psyches amongst the group.

I especially liked the precursor friendship interactions with teachers; the acknowledgement of my point of view was empowering. This all came to an end in my first attempt at Matriculation. I was doing so many things that I ended up failing the year, passing only in maths and physics.

Tilting at Windmills

My time at school was not one of subservience. I was managing the requirements of the institution so as to meet my own needs. I have clear memories of tilting at windmills at the high school. Authority was something to be dealt with and endured; you had to get around it as best you could. There was nothing malicious about such challenges, as we had respect for fellow human beings because of our understanding what hardships families had been through. One example of our this was with the dress code. In the reign of Torpey, kids were getting detention for not wearing caps. After each assembly Torpey would finish off with the instruction "Boys, put your caps on." One morning our form spontaneously decided not to do it. It was not a planned action, but a spontaneous one. He repeated the instruction and we still didn't comply, so he closed the meeting anyway.

Within a week the policy of boys having to wear caps was abandoned, and I'm sure some of the senior teachers were backing our stance behind the scenes. That foray into civic disobedience was the beginning of a long road of making our own decisions and living with the consequences.

Matriculation

I repeated my Matriculation, but I wasted the opportunity. In retrospect, I'd like to go back and do a lot more work for a far better result and go on to study lots of other things. But I learnt something about myself - I'm a lousy student. I excel in some areas of study, but at my own time table. I'm lousy at getting assignments in on the day required, etc, etc.

My parents appreciated the thinking brain and encouraged me to develop insight into problems. However, my questioning wasn't always well received at school. One year my chemistry teacher kicked me out of class six weeks before the exams. When my parents spoke to the school the justification for this action was that I kept asking questions of why and how in response to the teacher's presentation. Apparently these were questions you were not allowed to use too often at school. However, it's because of St Albans that I never stopped thinking.

The 'fifties and 'sixties in St Albans, and especially St Albans High School, bred a high level of personal self reliance and personal responsibility - if you want it done, do it! They were strengthening years, and I'm eternally grateful for the strength that St Albans gave me.

Conscientious Objection

I have a fairly clear sense of what's right and what's wrong and a strong sense of conscience. If I could at all avoid it, I wouldn't do something I didn't feel good about. I've been the kid who's been saying the emperor's got no clothes for as long as I can remember. Which has meant that I have fought against various ridiculous authorities, culminating probably in my largest challenge, which was when I was called up for National Service and Vietnam. I declined the invitation.

They spent the next three years trying to lock me up. They didn't succeed. Being anti-military and anti-organised-religion, even I was surprised that I had an early member of the RSL (my English teacher and senior master of St Albans High, Mr Matthews) giving evidence on my behalf. I also had a Catholic priest, Val Noone, giving evidence on my behalf.

I'm glad to report that the court accepted my position of conscientious objection.

Val and I have subsequently caught up

with each other. He ended up leaving the established church, though he's still a committed Christian. He became a lecturer at Western Institute and then moved to Melbourne

University.

My anti-war stance wasn't just for my own benefit. During the Gulf War I was working in television in Sydney. I thought the whole Gulf War was a beat up. Sadam Hussein was the US's man and he'd asked permission of the US to invade Kuwait. The exact wording of the telegram from April Gillespie, the American Ambassador, was "with respect to your in-Arab border dispute we have no position on the matter." This is diplomatic doublespeak that means "go for it." It was a setup for the US to try and get back control of Iraq and a few things.

At this time there was a demonstration outside the US consulate in Sydney. As I walked up they were calling for speakers, so I took the microphone and challenged the media to report my talk - and all the filming lights got turned off.

I said: "The reason this war is taking place is that America is in a recession, the raison d'être for a 1.5 million army in Europe has just collapsed because detente has broken out and the Berlin Wall has broken down. If America brought those troops back and put them on the unemployment market it would be chaotic. So they needed somewhere else to put them and they needed to crank up the industry. This has nothing to do with Sadam Hussein." I then quoted the message from April Gillespie. "It's got to do with the American economy and American control of the Middle East." All the media disappeared and I left.

Working for IBM

After Matric I did electronic engineering at RMIT, and with this background in 1969 I talked my way into a job with IBM as a field engineer. I worked with IBM for a couple of years and realised that doffing my cap to the Board and the company image and not saying boo was not my cup of tea, even though I quite enjoyed the work. Think of 1969 as the height of cool culture; everything was happening. At IBM you have to wear a suit and tie to work every day. I was running about five suits and a variety of coloured shirts with matching ties; interesting and top quality apparel.

One day I got pulled into the office by one of the managers. All he said was: "I'm going to tell you a story, Marin. There was a guy on the Board of IBM. He wore a coloured shirt to a Board meeting one time. He's now earning $8,000 a year less and isn't on the Board anymore."

I thought to myself: Is he kidding? Am I a 5-year-old? Shortly after that I left.

Teaching

After that I went to Melbourne Teachers College. Again, I got involved in all sorts of things. At this time I had a young son and a sick wife, so I was looking after my family, driving cabs full-time, and studying full-time at the same time. This is when I discovered my 24 hour nature. Things ceased to be happening on a particular day, it was always how many hours to the next commitment. That was rather interesting.

I also got involved in the political life at the Teachers College. This was back in the time when Whitlam came into power, the early 'seventies. I became a bit of a stirrer and ratbag around the college, a vocal member of the left.

I first taught at St Pauls College in Altona. Then I got a job working with hyperactive and emotionally disturbed youth at a unit in Kew called Kurrajong Secondary, and worked there a few years. I found it the most stressful and most rewarding work I have ever experienced.

Ten years after the unit had closed I was in Sydney, and one night I received a telephone call from three of the kids from the unit. They had traced me down just to say hi and thanks, and asked me to join them for a beer next time I was in Melbourne. You don't expect that after ten years. My rather unconventional manner had got through to them. Not all of the kids, but some of the ones the other teachers couldn't get through to I got through to, because I saw the problem somewhat differently. It makes you feel you've actually done something.

Video Production

After Kurrajong I went back to cab driving. One day I collected a passenger from Channel 10, and in the trip from Nunawading to Belgrave I talked my way into a job. Shortly afterwards I started as a trainee tape operator at Channel 10 (Channel 0, as it was then known). I worked for Channel 0/10 and for Channel 9 Sydney, became a supervising tape operator for Kerry Packer at his production house, Video Tape Corp, in Sydney, and moved to a couple of other production houses.

Then in 1986 I bought a shelf company called Becuvo Proprietary Limited and started my own production company. The name didn't mean anything but we thought of it as the Bureau of Executive Video Operators. We were a bunch of loons but pioneered magazine publication in electronic format, and released the world's first motor cycle magazine video. Instead of reading Rev, Two Wheels, or AMCN, you sat down and watched a 90 minute program. That went right around the world, to the Cannes Video Festival and all sorts of places. We sold part of it to Channel 4 in England. This was in 1987.

It was going nicely and we'd just made our way onto the NSW government's list of preferred

tenders list for video production. Then thanks to Mr Keating and the recession we had to have the company closed down. The majority of our money was coming from promotional videos, or corporates as they were called. With the recession no one was spending on video production, they were trying to find a rock to crawl under and hide themselves rather than promote themselves.

We went down for about $120,000 but the partners paid off the debt.

Earlier, I had had a serious offer to have my own studio built if I was prepared to do porn videos. My response was thanks but no thanks.

Selling Bullion

I next became involved in a company that was dealing in bullion. My job was basically as an information analyst. We never actually sold any gold, but if any one of the deals had ever dropped you'd be talking to a billionaire right now. What the business research was excellent for was finding out who was doing what in the world. It was an incredible intelligence base. As a result, the organisation was infiltrated by both Yankee and Chinese security agents, who didn't half make their presence obvious. One of the characters, a Chinese guy, went back to China at the time of Tienaman Square and then left China again - no one was getting out of there at the time unless they were working for the government.

San Sernin Sur Rance in France

Through this company I met people who were involved with the video display industry. That's when I got a job working with the French. It was about 1990. When I was a kid I played with radio valves, but after IBM I wasn't involved with electronics, I was word smithing. Then I got straight back into electronics and picked up chip technology. It was quite challenging and I was quite happy with the challenge of coming to terms with chip level devices, doing maintenance in the field.

I was based in a little town about 100 kilometres east of Toulouse, a little village called San Sernin Sur Rance. The whole village of about 500 people would go out of their way to show this Australian how to have a good time. I wasn't complaining. I was living in a small hotel in the village, run by Pierre Carayon, and which had been in the family for about five generations. When I came back and retold the story to my sister-in-law, who has refined food tastes, she went into total apoplexy because apparently that hotel is written up in the Michelin Guide and is a place people drive half-way across France to eat at. And I was living there.

The Australian arm of the business went broke, so that was the end of that career.

Guam

I was contacted by a chap from Guam, who was heir to a couple of million US. Sonny had bought a whole lot of video walls and a video wall company in Inarajan and had been ripped off unmercifully by US technicians. He flew me out and I did a six-week stint, solved 90% of his problems without ripping him off, so I got a twelve-month contract. I was living in Guam being looked after by Sonny Adda. I was doing it tough: I had a Mazda MX5 as my company car, a two-bedroom apartment a couple miles from the beach, and US$1,000 in the pocket every week.

They'd never come across anyone who'd actually done real work. The first time I put in a 24-hour stint they were beside themselves. They couldn't understand how anyone could put in a 24-hour shift. My view was the job had to be done - end of story. I'd come from working with television timetables where you're told that's your deadline, you've got to be on air then. You did it. There was a lot of rapport there, a lot of satisfaction. I had a good life. Then Guam was hit by an earthquake and the job vaporised.

When I came back to Australia I walked into unemployment for the first time in my life. I found it very difficult to find work, so I started doing odds and ends, such as maintaining video walls on a contract basis. Sydney was very expensive so I came back to Victoria. Then my mother's eyesight went and I started looking after her. So, I've been a carer ever since.

Sometimes I wish I hadn't developed such a strong sense of conscience, because it has cost me dearly, financially speaking. I find I cannot bring myself to work for organisations whose raison d'être I don't like.

For example, I was offered the contract to do all the navy training films when I had my video production company in Sydney. This would have been the opportunity to sit back, relax, you've just won the jackpot sort of thing. I had to say no. Other people had asked me to work on more dubious sorts of videos, to whom I also said no.

A few years ago I thought of going back to university to study law. I was accepted into the course but then knocked the offer back because I realised I was a lousy student the first time round, and what was going to be different this time?

Marin Gunew, 2005.

Cathy Alexopoulos Nee Hatjiandreou: Teacher

My family is from Greece. My father immigrated to Australia in 1955, two years earlier than the rest of the family. We eventually joined dad in March, 1957. In Greece my father had attempted several businesses but they had all fallen by the wayside. At that point in time, 1954, my aunty married Mr Xeros, an Australian of Greek origin. They were married in Greece though Mr Xeros was born here. He encouraged my father to come to Australia, and that was the impetus for us migrating.

I was born in 1947, two years after WWII. From my younger years I recall the air raids, the flashing lights in the night and the constant tank parades on the main roads. The earthquakes we experienced occasionally were equally frightening. I had a godmother who was quite wealthy, she lived in the Peloponese. I used to go for holidays there all the time and I had the best of clothes and other treats. All in all my childhood was a happy one with fond memories and events.

Coming to Australia

Our family came to Australia as independent migrants, so dad had to find the money for the fares not only for his wife and kids but for my grandmother, my mother's mother, as well. Olga was her name.

We touched Australian soil in Darwin and then proceeded to Melbourne where we were met by my aunty's family.

Dad had started working for the railways and he had a group of friends in St Albans who had bought land and most of them were building part houses. Dad had also started to create a part house because we were coming. It was the beginning of the house that would be built eventually. It was on the corner of Ruth and Kate streets opposite the old primary school.

Because our part house wasn't yet ready we lived in Richmond with another family, in the usual way that a lot of other Greeks and Italians and other immigrants started off in a shared house.

Moving to St Albans

After living a few months in Richmond we moved to St Albans and lived under the most arduous conditions. We left Greece from a suburb of Athens that had electricity, running water, even a stove and a fridge. We came St Albans … oh well, what a hell hole! We had no electricity, no running water and no windows, because dad couldn't afford windows at the time or the payment for the connection of the services. The part house had two rooms and he created a little shed at the back that was the kitchen. We cooked on a kerosene stove. It was very cold and so we had a kerosene heater. I recall one day that the heater caught on fire. Luckily we were in the house and managed to douse the fire, but all the smoke and fumes made the room even darker.

The Hatjiandreou family in St Albans.

Because we didn't have electricity we had one of those kerosene lamps. One day, Michael being a naughty boy as he was as a young kid, he thumped it, so you can imagine what followed ...

We were five people in those two rooms. That was the situation we were living under until dad managed to gather up enough money to extend. At that point my mother wasn't working and he was still paying off the loan for our fares. Finally we got electricity and we saw the light…. Then came water.

Water was another saga. The school was opposite, so my grandmother and I used to get some big casseroles pots and cart water backwards and forwards from the school. That was the water we had initially. I don't know how long that went on for, but for me as a young kid it seemed like a lifetime. Mum couldn't understand how people lived here. In Greece she had electricity and a refrigerator and here we had blocks of ice being delivered for the ice chest.

The other thing about St Albans at that time and for many years later was the wonderful roads that we had, those beautiful tree-lined streets, they were just something else; spectacular stuff. If mud skating had been a sport we would have been champions. During that time it used to rain consistently. This was a time when lots of adjustments had to be made.

How can I forget the dunny … most times overflowing and the repercussions when our playful, young dog would chase the dunny man. These experiences are unforgettable!

Making Adjustments

Everyday existence was rather difficult and my mother started feeling unwell - her heart started playing up. We were very fortunate that Dr Brooks was available. He was an Englishman who had lived in Egypt and spoke several languages, one of them being French. My mother grew up in Lyon, France. She was very comfortable in seeing this gentleman with all her ailments that those we got as young kids. I always used to get chilblains from the cold. I also suffered from tonsillitis and this kind doctor was administering penicillin very often to me.

I remember that we couldn't afford things. I had a very close friend, Danielle, who lived in View Street closer to the high school. We were friends from the primary years and later in the high school. Her family were more established in St Albans and had a better lifestyle at that point in time. Once I was invited to her birthday and I wanted to go, but what would I give her? There was a hardware store in East Esplanade near the Goddard's store. I saw these most beautiful little ornaments there. In actual fact my ornaments came in a set of two. I said to mum "I want to get her this." She said it costs too much but her compromise was "tell them you only want one." I didn't realise my ornaments were a pepper and salt shaker and you can't really separate them. But that's how it was, money was tight.

We experienced some interesting episodes due to lack of language, particularly on the part of my parents, because the kids started to pick up the language quickly. One day we went to Goddard's supermarket, it was already a supermarket then because they had the wire baskets and you selected what you wanted off the shelf. We went looking for cocoa because we didn't know the name of it we found something brownish in a packet and it looked grainy, so we bought that. We came home and found it was Gravox – it was a gravy mixture. The stories you hear from people improvising ways of overcoming the language barrier are quite amazing, like walking around and clucking like a chicken because they didn't know the word for chicken.

They were difficult years, but they were fun years too because we were kids and those other things weren't important to us, we took them in our stride.

Primary School

When I was in primary school running around the yard I fell over on the gravel, because the whole playground was full of gravel. I had a really bad gash on the knee, and still have the scar from that on my knee. The teachers attended to me and immediately said you must go to hospital and have that stitched. I told them I lived across the road, and they trusted, as you would then, because I used to go home for lunch. I went across with Danielle and said to mum I had to go to hospital for stitches. She looked at it: "Ah, it looks alright, look's fine. You'll be alright in a couple of days. When you get married there won't be anything there."

When I went back all I could say to them, because my English was very poor, was: "We look after. We look after." I didn't understand what that meant though I think the intent of "we'll do something later" was interpreted as "we'll take care of it." That was my reply. Sure enough, we never did do anything with it and it took forever to heal because it was a very bad gash and had so much dirt I was very lucky it didn't get infected. But hey, that made you tougher, more enduring.

When we made friends we really supported each other, and I'm talking of friendships that went through to high school. High school for me was a half-hour hike, which we did religiously every day through rain, hail, and sunshine. High school was another world because there were more people there and more that you had to master. However, I took everything in my stride.

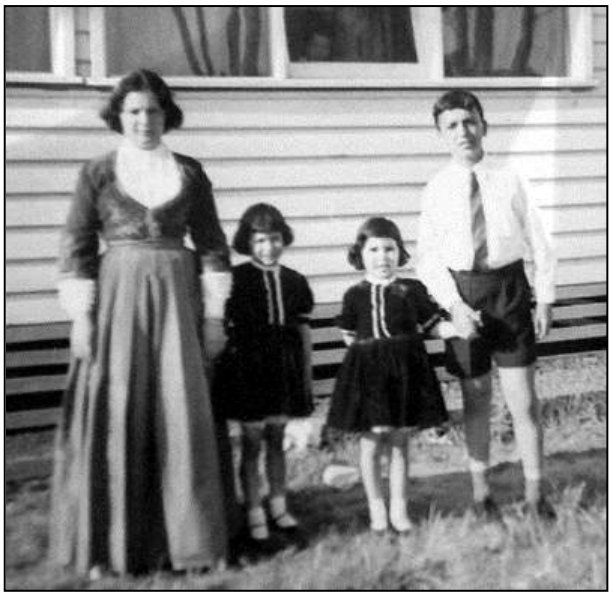
I recall that we couldn't buy the summer dress and had to make it. I think most of the uniforms then were patterns and a lot of women did sewing. My auntie used to be very handy with her hands and we had a sewing machine which we'd brought from Greece. I remember making my clothes. In fact the high school dress that I still have still is a handmade dress.

House Fire

On the 18th January 1961, when I was in Form 1 at high school, our house burnt down due to an electrical fault. It was a devastating day for a couple of reasons. At 5 o'clock that morning my grandmother died in the Footscray hospital. We didn't have a phone, so my aunty and uncle who had a phone came with their children and told us. My mother had just started working as a cleaner for the State Bank of Victoria in the city. It was her second day with the job and she couldn't ask for leave, so she had to go to work. She left for work about 3 pm because it was an afternoon shift. As she was travelling on the train she saw fire engines coming to St Albans but didn't know what was going on - she didn't know that her house was burning down.

My mother had been looking after some children at home. That was common in those days because child care was almost non existent or too expensive. We had two children whom we were looking after, and were responsible for until my mother could see whether or not she was going to continue with

her job. My aunty was there to look after the children so was I, and Michael was there as well. That afternoon the electrical wiring in the house shorted and the house caught fire. My brother was a very good sprinter and he raced across the railway line to Alexina Street where there was a fire brigade alert box and he set off the alarm. By the time the fire brigade came we had already got those kids out and ourselves.



Cathy & Michael with Olga & Ivy Xeros, early 1960s.

My mother had always kept some money and some valuables in the house, and she'd told me where she kept the valuables. She hadn't told me where she kept the money so that went, but the valuables I managed to get out with me, plus a bedspread that I really prized. All we could do was watch as the house burnt and my aunty was screaming and screaming. The fire brigade came and did whatever they could do. Then my dad came home. He had gone with my uncle to organise my grandmother's funeral. As they were coming back they could see the smoke but, again, didn't realise whose house it was. My mum was leaving and they were coming.

What did not burn was so water damaged by the fire hoses that we lost absolutely everything. That's when we moved to Windsor for a year. We stayed in the house where my aunty was living in for a short time and attended Caulfield Central. So I had a year of experience with a different type of crowd, mostly Jewish people, and a completely different world. At that time we weren't sure if we would come back to St Albans and I was enrolled in MacRob. I'm not sure to this day if I did the right thing in coming back, but we came back and I started again in Year 9 at St Albans High.

Returning to St Albans High

I remember doing some maths exercises one day when I was having a problem and Mr Pavlov saying: "That posh school didn't teach you anything. Bring me your report card." I won't forget Mr Pavlov.

I recall the athletics. I used to represent the school in javelin, shotput and discus. I don't think there were too many students, especially girls, wanting to do those events. I enjoyed that and had fun. Though we didn't have many amenities, we supported each other. There were teachers who went out of their way to do things for us. There was a young teacher in Year 11 - I've forgotten her name - who organised group outings to the Dandenongs, or maybe it was Warburton or Warrandyte. Our world was very small: the city and St Albans. She used to take us on hikes. I went with Karen Frede, a very good friend with whom I still communicate, and there was Helga Mucke. I think we all had a fantasy to be out in the country and she gave us that opportunity on several occasions. Most of the songs we used to sing were scout songs, so she might have been with the girl guides.

We used to organise the socials at the St Albans Public Hall with real live bands. The headmasters were supportive because they understood we weren't louts and that we were doing the right thing.

I had a very good friend by the name of Tania Korinfsky who had a sort of step brother, Leo Suszko, who was an entrepreneur from a young age. We organised bus trips to Falls Creek, Lorne and Torquay. I'd never been to these places and we had wonderful times. There was a lot of camaraderie and a willingness to get out of the mould and do things you hadn't done.

I remember the plays and choirs and being involved in the SRC. I was also involved with the debating club. I remember going to Olympic Park for athletic competitions and the Olympic Pool for swimming sports. They were good years.

Mr Torpey was very strict, but I had no problems with that because my father was like that. I won't forget Mrs Gliddon telling me one day from what she could understand of what I was telling her about my dad that "He seems very autocratic."

Despite everything they were all very generous at the high school. In the early days my parents couldn't afford a lot of things. When I had to buy a prefect blazer my mother said she couldn't afford it, so the school gave me half the money to buy it. To try and help my family I would always go for the studentships. Every year from Intermediate onwards I applied for those because I had the ambition of becoming a teacher and it was a good way of getting a few dollars.

Teachers

Someone I remember very vividly, because I loved anything to do with literature, was Mrs Gliddon and the way she conveyed literature to us. She was my best teacher, but she was a my

mentor as well. She certainly had time for you, especially for females because she was the senior mistress.

Mrs Gliddon opened up a whole new world, not only academically but also socially - she was a person with many attributes which she wanted to convey to her students as well. I used to travel on my own on the train or sometimes with groups of friends and after an outing walk home after 11 at night. That didn't mean a thing because I was not afraid. The world was somehow safer and more naïve then. I remember dressing up nicely - you'd make sure all the clothes matched whenever we went to the city for a performance. Mrs Gliddon encouraged us to see Shakespearean plays, Greek tragedies, musical comedies or opera as well. We used to get a season ticket to the Youth Orchestra at the Melbourne Town Hall. They used to do this once a year and there would be a series of them. I would go with Maija Svars, Eva Radiskevics, and others. Maija and Eva were good piano players, whereas I didn't play any instrument. I would have loved to play an instrument but I never really did. One of the things I wanted was a piano, which I urged my mother to buy, which she eventually did. I even had a tutor to come and teach me, but it was a bit later in life.

We used to visit theatre groups like La Mamma. I became a member of the Melbourne Theatre Company. These were formative years that opened up a lot of things for you. I must say it was all due to Mrs Gliddon. I was not only impressed by it but it became part of me.

Mr Rayner was a person with remarkable human qualities. When I was in Form 5 I was doing science and one of reasons I did it was because some teachers pressured me. They said "You're a good student, you'll do well in science." I never really wanted to do science and that year I didn't pass; I failed science. I was so angry. We were fixing up a house in Windsor and Barry Rayner turned up. I don't know how he found out where we were but he found out and came specifically to say to me "You've got to come back to school." I was so angry and so upset at having failed. Barry doesn't recall that, but I do. Who else would have gone to the trouble to do that?

There was a French teacher, Miss Coutts. This poor lady, the boys gave her hell: Lindsay Chatterton and my brother, Henry Goralski, and the rest of them. One day this poor woman came running out of the class crying her eyes out. She wore short skirts that were almost mini skirts and I think that's partly why the boys were so naughty. She refused to go back.

I remember Mr Henry, the maths teacher with the missing hand. He was a wonderful teacher and a gentleman. A lovely man. He had a calliper on that arm and was so dextrous with it.

Group Discussions

There were several students who left an impression on me. We used to have quite a lot of group discussions and some of them were very heated ones. These involved Smith and Lawrence Schwab and many others. Laurence was a different type of character to Broderick; I was very close with his sister Katrin. Broderick and Laurie were very close mates, joined by Knut Werner. There was always some sense of animosity between myself and Broderick. One day I was passing him in the crowded school corridor, when the point of his compass was sticking out and got stuck into my hand. I'm sure it was an accident but I still have a little scar to remind me of the incident. I'm still waiting to meet up and tell him and ask for compensation.

Part-time Work

From about the Intermediate year I always used to work full time during the school holidays. Holidays were revenue raising time. I worked for Waltons in the credit department and learnt all about credit in the main store in Bourke Street. With the money I earned I bought my first beauty case and my first suit case. I won't forget Waltons. Prior to that, with my friend Veronica Debevc (now Sutherland) we got a job working early in the morning at the Salvation Army in the city making breakfast for the homeless. We'd get there really early to make the breakfast. I remember getting my first pay in a yellow envelope. That was our first paying job and it was quite exciting. I also worked for a law firm, for National Mutual in the fire department, and for a friend running a café. All holidays and term breaks like Easter I used to work at that café, the Legend, in Lonsdale Street. You would also find me at the Herald Art Show in the Treasury Gardens, and I continued working at that event when I was in my tertiary studies. I got a lot of experience in doing things and nothing stopped me.

To get a job I would say I am leaving school and need a job. So they gave me a job. Who can do that today? One year I went to National Mutual and told them "I think I've failed and I don't want to go back." I was working in the fire insurance section and I recall when the holidays finished I said to the manager, "Look, maybe I better go back to school and finish my education. It looks like things will be getting tougher in the future and I will need tertiary qualifications."

She said to me: "Why? Come with me." She took me to the top floor and there was this humungous mainframe computer. It was the latest equipment. She was showing me this to entice me to stay on. She said, "This is the future." I was to be a keyhole punch operator or something like that. "This is the future. Don't go back. This is where the money is." I won't forget that.

I don't know what other people's experiences were or what they took on from what was offered at the school. St Albans might not have offered much, but it's what you made of those little opportunities that were available. I took advantage of a lot of things.

School Friendships

The other thing I recall is this desire to open up different worlds and learn. I had a friend Lydia, who was part Yugoslav and part Italian but spoke Italian. She lived not far from my house in Kate Street. I just loved to learn Italian, so for a whole year, every Saturday morning we would go to University High to learn Italian. That was probably in Form 5, and it was another interesting experience. The French I was doing at school was only offered by correspondence. Either we didn't have teachers capable of teaching French or perhaps not at that particular level. There were only a handful of us doing French. We did have some assistance from staff and we passed. I also did it at first year university when I was doing my arts degree.

I think in the majority of cases our parents wanted us to learn and were eager to help their children to achieve something they hadn't. This was the country of the future and opportunity.

I made some very, very good friends but the reason these friendships weren't lasting for me is that I moved overseas in 1971, which stopped that continuity. But it's interesting that a few did visit me in Greece: Maija Svars came, Maria Jaciow, Melissa Jankovic, and others whose names I've forgotten. I kept in communication with others, such as Nick Szwed and Peter Nowatschenko who married my cousin Olga.

Classmates of 1963. Cathy Hatjiandreou is in the back row, second from right.

Tertiary Studies

I started doing an arts degree at Monash. That's when we moved from St Albans to Glen Iris, because both my brother and I were studying at Monash University, Michael was doing Civil engineering then. I was doing an Arts degree as the basis for secondary teaching. Then I decided to do primary teaching and transferred to the Melbourne Teachers College. That was two-year degree then. They were another wonderful two years. I finished the course and started teaching at Clifton Hill where I taught for two years. Then I went to Greece.

Living in Greece

One of the reasons for going to Greece was that I'd had enough of studying and working and I just wanted to have a holiday. One other thing that really prompted me to go was that I had an uncle whom I really loved a lot and he was in his dying days, so I just managed to see him, which was a bit of a shock, but I did see him before he died. I went on my own and travelled around, but only in Greece. While I was there on holidays I was offered jobs, which were mostly tutoring in English. The opportunities there were great.

Then Jim (my future husband) came back to Greece. I had met Jim in St Albans where he used to live with his brother. He had left about a year earlier and was working with Kodak. We met up again, I decided to stay on, and we got married the following year in April of 1972. It was easy for me to get a job so I was working without problems. Europe is different to Australia. Europe has the roots of my background and that was an important part of finding yourself. It has an aliveness which you cannot feel unless you live there. It is a living component in your life. Because I'm interested in history, I suppose, and archaeology, the world was there for me. Not that you could travel every day.

In Athens you tend to live in apartments. We had two children. Alex is now 31 and Dianne is 30. They started their education at the British Embassy School, because there was always this idea in the back of my mind that we might come back to Australia.

Returning to Australia

We came back to Melbourne in 1984 and Kodak was able to transfer Jim here to the Kodak factory in Coburg. He was Marketing Manager at that point in time. Coming back meant I had to upgrade my qualifications, which I did. I studied full time and completed two years in one. That was back at Melbourne University.

I went back to teaching at St. Anargiry school, which is a private Greek School in Oakleigh. I was the coordinator of the primary school. That was a most fulfilling job. Initially we had 108 students in the primary school, and a decade later I ended up with 360 kids. That was quite an adventure and I had a tremendous time. It was a time when my children were growing up and starting to be independent. I used to sometimes work for ten hours a day. I gave a lot of my time and effort in spite of a lot of other things that were going on. It was a fulfilling job because not only were you developing as a teacher but you gave yourself as well.

I left there in 1995 and had very long break. We went to Greece for another holiday, renovated our house, had friends over from USA and Greece and list goes on... Then I started

getting jittery again and started doing a bit of emergency teaching, a lot of tutoring, and some extended contract teaching. Eventually I said if I'm going to go back the only school I'm going back to is a government school which is up the road, which is Lloyd Street Primary School, which is within walking distance of home. We had just come back from holidays when they phoned me up and offered me a full-time job. I worked there for about 4 years and got sick with ovarian cancer, in September 2001. Then I stopped working full time and since then have been doing some casual relief teaching on and off.

Current Activities

In the meantime I became the president of the Greek-Australian Cultural League, which demands a lot of my time. Voluntary work always does, doesn't it?

I also try to fulfill my life with other things which I enjoy such as travelling, walking, enjoying the company of friends and having a good time with them when I can. You still devote yourself to your family, helping your parents. My father is still alive. Dad is 91 and is in an aged care centre. I visit him 3 or 4 times a week. Mum, 86, is still at home, and has her own health problems. My brother and I help both of them out. We also try to help other people. I like to keep in touch with my aunty and see her often. I do what I can, but I'm pacing myself as well.

My health is up and down though I'm okay at the moment. I'm in remission, which is a word I hate with a vengeance. I would like to say that I'm free of cancer. I'm saying to myself that I don't have it and will not get it again. That is just a word, but it has to be a belief as well. You go on, no matter what, and have a positive attitude.

Cathy Alexopoulos, 2006.

Jim and Cathy Alexopoulos, at the High School's 50th Anniversary dinner, 2006.

Gerhardt "Gerry" Haumann : Donauschwaben

Gerry Haumann and his family came to St Albans in October 1954. They were Donauschwaben from Batschka Brestowatz, in the northern part of the former Yugoslavia. The Batschka area was previously part of Hungary, which was part of the Austrian Empire until the First World War, hence the German influence. German colonists settled in the area in the eighteenth century when it was part of the southern Hungarian military frontier, though in Batschka Brestowatz there had been a German presence ever since 1786. The Donauschwaben or 'Danube-Swabians' are people named after their ancestors who left their homeland of Swabia in south-western Germany and floated down the Danube right through to Batschka and the Banat to settle lands that had been recaptured from the Ottoman Empire. Colonists from Germany, Switzerland, and north-eastern France were enticed to the new frontier by the Austrian Empire's promises of land in exchange for labour.

In the 1920s there were more than 500,000 ethnic Germans settled in Yugoslavia, representing about 4.3% of the population at that time. At that time Batschka Brestowatz had a population of 5,000 people, the large majority of whom were of German background. At least 350,000 Germans fled the country after the Second World War. After being imprisoned in Yugoslavia for a couple of years the Haumann family fled to Austria and from there migrated to Australia as stateless persons.

Gerry Huamann and his parents 1950

We arrived on the ship Fair Sea in Melbourne on 29 March 1954, after a five-week journey from Bremerhaven in Germany. After a few weeks at the immigration camp at Bonegilla in northern Victoria we came to Chelsea and were living in a boarding house that was supported by the Catholic Church through

Charitas. My father and two older brothers obtained work with the Victorian Railways. The family then bought land in Alfrieda Street, St Albans. Originally there were two blocks of land, with a bungalow on the corner with an empty block next to it. The family home was built on that, and it took a number of years to complete as we had to finance it ourselves. It was not easy to get finance from the banks in those days.

Expect the Unexpected

Things are sure different in St Albans to other places in Australia. As I went down the road, I noticed an odd-looking car, because one of the front mudguards was painted blue and the other one purple. It also looked rather odd from the back, as it had the same colour scheme except on opposite sides. It certainly was different, one could say, but it must have been easy to find in car parks. Anyway, so much for that observation, because you should always expect the unexpected in St Albans.

St Albans Shopping Centre

When my family first arrived in St Albans there were very few shops and you could only buy a limited range of food. Now one can buy all different kinds of food from all nationalities and there are a lot from Asia, Europe, Africa, South America and some Aussies.

Now the shopping centre stretches from the station along Main Road East to Erica Street and up Alfrieda Street. There are no less than 12 hairdressers, and a basic haircut costs $7. In that same area there is no shortage of doctors (6-8) and about the same amount of take-aways. There is also an abundance of employment agencies, which makes one think there must be money to be made out of unemployment services, otherwise these private concerns wouldn't operate them.

Again, when we first arrived there were very few cars. Now the car parking in the shopping area is just shocking.

Brief History of St Albans

The current St Albans is a far cry from what it was like when my parents, brothers and I came to St Albans in October 1954. Things in those days were very primitive to say the least - there were about a dozen shops and no made roads to speak of.

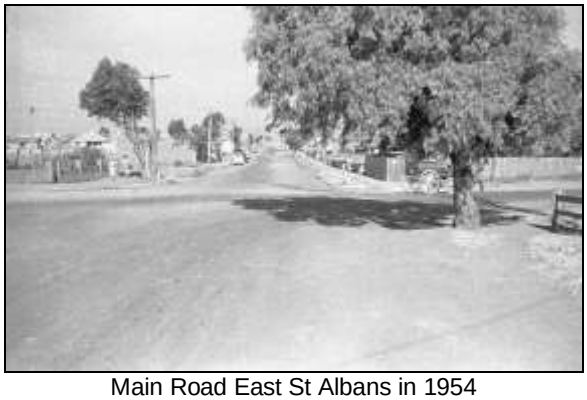
Our family was a lot more fortunate than a lot of people because our place in Alfrieda Street was close to the train station. We also had water connected to our place, and a bath, although we had to heat the water outside in a copper and carry it in by bucket.

A lot of people didn't have water at all for quite some time. I remember a lady from two streets away coming to our place and getting two buckets of water in the morning and at night. Saturdays she would get quite a lot more for the washing and weekly bath for her and the family; I think they had two kids. That seems too much to comprehend these days, but that was St Albans in the early 1950s.

Wait, there is more - can you image no drains, that's right. Around 1955 or '56 graders made gravel roads and open gutters, into which the kitchen, bath, and laundry waste water ran, not at all ideal. Also, when it rained the streets and gutters were just mud, and the cars that were around got easily bogged.

Most people were going to work by train, apart from the occasional taxi, which was an unusual sight. Trains were the only form of public transport available in the area. On rainy days people would walk to the station in their gumboots and change into their shoes at the station, leaving the gumboots there. When they came home from work the gumboots would still be there. (Not so today.)

The baker used to deliver bread in a horse-drawn carriage. The milkman used to also deliver the milk in a horse-drawn wagon; the horse was so familiar with the delivery route it would know where to stop. People would leave the money for the milkman out by the meter box or such places. Nothing was stolen.



Main Road East St Albans in 1954

Although things were pretty primitive in relation to today's mod-cons, people were more content and happier, also very proud of what they had and where they lived. It is sad to see St Albans now, as it seems to have lost it's proudness.

St Albans High School

St Albans High School started in 1956. The principal was Mr Barker, and the sports teacher was Mr Walsh. Some of the teachers I remember were Mr Lahy, Mr Alcorn, and Mr Murphy. The buildings for the High School in Main Road East St Albans were not finished by the start of the school year in 1956, so we had to go to Sunshine, to a temporary building at the Presbyterian Church Hall in Anderson Street, Sunshine (between Sunshine Bowls Club and George Cross Soccer Club). The Hall was partitioned off into three "classrooms", which were rather crowded. For woodwork class we

had to walk to Sunshine Tech which was about one kilometre away, carrying our gear; for us at the time it wasn't too bad at all. I remember about half way through the year we had a reporter from The Herald (the afternoon paper at the time) come to our school and do a bit of a write-up as there were around 20 different nationalities at our school, mainly of European origin, so it was strange to hear names like Jones or Smith.

I remember going to the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games with the school. (I was fortunate that my parents could pay for the ticket.) This was the first time I had been to the MCG and the crowd was just huge. I was able to see Betty Cuthbert win her gold medal; she was a sprinter in the 100 and 200 metre events that year.

St Albans High School was supposed to be finished in time for the 1957 school year, but it wasn't. However, there were enough rooms finished for the school to open. From the High School you could see all the way towards Albion, because there were only empty paddocks in that direction, same as going towards Sunshine Avenue. These days it is completely filled with housing.

Sometime in 1957, a grass fire came racing towards our new school, just after lunch, so us kids all went to the fight the fire, and lucky enough we managed to hold it before reaching our shelter shed. When the voluntary Fire Brigade arrived they praised us for our efforts. Needless to say it made our day. It is hard to image this now, but that was St Albans High then.

As well as being principal Mr Barker was also our science teacher. We had Mr Walsh for history, Mr Alcorn for maths, and Mr Lahy for French. Thinking back now it must have been pretty hard for those teachers trying to pronounce some of those Eastern European names. As for me I was proud to have gone to St Albans High. I always felt the school was prepared to help you if you wanted to be helped. The school is now a far cry from its simple and tough beginning, though I do hope that it still has the same ideals.

St Albans shopping centre Main Road West 1954

St Albans Supermarket

Where the present IGA supermarket is located there used to be a little country store that also used to sell petrol, owned by the Self family, who were later joined by the Goddards. That little store in the late 1950s became a little "self service", because the owners were prepared to provide good service and get anything and everything that their customers asked for. It grew to a big supermarket. Everyone in St. Albans knew where 'Selfs' was; it was an icon. It was closed for some time, but now it seems to be as busy as ever.

East Esplanade St Albans 1950s

St Albans Station

In 1954 the St Albans Station was located on the same side of the railway line except on the northern side of the crossing. It was a wooden building with a ticket office, an office that had the controls to open and shut the gates, a little shed to store things, and one where bikes were stored hanging up on the front wheel. In the 1960s it was rebuilt on its present site south of the crossing, with a second platform added to it some time later, and the new Melbourne-bound platform being built not that long ago.

Gerry Haumann, 2004.

(L-R) Gerry, Joe, and Hon Haumann 2004

This is a reprint of an article prepared by Gerry Haumann in 2004. Photographs supplied by and copyright Kon Haumann from his early St Albans collection, 1954.

Helena Vasjuta nee Ribarow: Bank Clerk, Sales Assistant, Volunteer

When we first came to St Albans late in 1951 it was mainly open paddocks. There were about eight families in our little area of Henry Street. Opposite us there was a small farm, or the remnants of one, with a few horses and a pond on the corner. This was the type of property that was now being redeveloped into residential blocks, and before long that's exactly what happened to this one. Further east over Leslie Street was some grazing land still in use with a few sheep visible if we ever explored down that way, and at times I remember the farmer growing grain of some sort in those fields.

Our home was a one-room bungalow, which eventually became the bathroom. It was made of weatherboard and was completely unlined on the inside. The four of us lived in just that room for some time, before dad built an extension. We didn't have any water connected at first and had to fill our bucket from Mr and Mrs Melnik's place two houses away as they had a connection in their front yard.

Childhood Pastimes

My brother and I made friends with Veronica from next door and we'd have fun playing together. We were never allowed to stray very far from home. On some of the fun days we did simple things like sitting on the nature strip about a hundred yards away from home, backs against the old corrugated iron fence of the farmlet across the road, picking wild daisies or bachelor's buttons and making dandelion chain necklaces like mum taught us. The profusion of yellow flowers was delightful and we chanted some now-forgotten nursery rhyme.

Veronica Hoffman, Peter Rajek, Helena Ribarow, Teresa Ribarow (front), Joseph Ribarow, 1957

There was the small farm property still fenced off across the road. This was an old chook farm that belonged to the Lewis family but I don't think it was operating when we moved there. Occasionally we saw a horse roaming in the fenced paddock opposite us. We were delighted when we would hear a meadow lark and spot the little bird hovering above us in the air. It was a tranquil scenario. At the corner of the crossroad of Henry and Walter streets the farmyard was screened off by corrugated iron fencing adjacent to a pond. The house itself was in Walter street and flanked by rows of large pine trees, and a couple of really tall gums in the centre of their large back yard, which was an unusual sight in the area as there were very few trees visible to us.

Starting School

Life was even rather funny when you look back. I remember getting a real shock when I first went to school, because I hadn't realised that there was another language. Around our little neighbourhood there were only a few houses, all with people of European background, and we could all understand each other to some extent because we grew up hearing different languages - usually there were some common words and people often spoke several languages anyway. At that time we were too young to realise that they were different languages, although we had been told that people came from different parts of the world. However, countries meant nothing to us.

School was different, because it was probably the first time I would have heard English. When I first went to the St Albans Primary School in 1953 I didn't know what was wrong, because I could see that the teachers were talking, but it didn't make any sense to me. It was almost as if I had been struck deaf.

Grade 3c, 1955. Helena is second from the right, second row from the back.

That first day I came home at lunch-time. I didn't know what I was supposed to do, and when everyone rushed out at lunch-time I thought they were going home, so I left as well. I had a vague idea where to go and when I got near the church I felt relieved, because mum had taken us to

church and I knew where our home was from there. Mum was surprised to see me and took me back. I've always remembered this day as my introduction to Australian education, and I think it's a good story to tell about how you learn about life even when you don't know what to expect.

I was transferred to the new school in Station Street when that opened up in 1956, and then went to the Sacred Heart school in 1957.

Polish School

My brother and I also went to Polish classes at the Sacred Heart Church during 1957 and 1958. These Saturday classes were for the elementary level and were run by the Polish nuns from Essendon; they were our first introduction to grammar, spelling, and writing in Polish. Mum liked to see us doing our homework at the kitchen table, and Joe and I both enjoyed drawing pictures and the colouring-in exercises. We stopped going to the classes when we were put into the childrens home, and we never did go back.

School and Work

I stayed at Sacred Heart until Grade 7, and then went to St Albans High School in 1960. I enjoyed the new school, and got very good results. That year I was top of the class at the mid-year exams, and I was pleased when the form teacher, Miss Cordell, wrote that I was one of the best pupils in the class.

I started working part-time for Ted Earl in 1961; he had a shoe shop in Main Road West, though later he transferred the business to Alfrieda Street. I would work on Saturdays and during the school holidays. I would give most of the money to my mother so that we could start fixing up the house. Mr Earl was a really kind and compassionate man.

I obtained my Intermediate Certificate at the end of 1962. After that I applied for a job with the State Savings Bank, and ended up working at their Sunshine Branch. I worked there for a number of years while still working part time at the shoe shop.

Helena (L) and friends from St Albans High School

I eventually left the bank and was working full-time for Mr Earl, but then reverted to part-time work when the children were born. Since I started working for him after school in 1961, I would have worked for about 20 years with him, until the early 1980s.

Earls Shoeland in Alfrieda Street 1970s

Siblings

I have a brother who is two years younger and a sister born when I was six years old. Joseph and I were born in Germany after the war, and my sister Teresa was born in Melbourne in 1952.

I remember dad taking us to the hospital to see mum and the baby. Teresa looked so small and cute it was a real wonder to see her. I remember feeling very responsible for her and tried to look after her at home. She had us all worried one year when she wandered away with the young boy next door; they must have been about three or four years of age. When we discovered that they were missing everyone was frantic and search parties of neighbours were scouring the streets for them. They were eventually found unharmed, having decided that they would go exploring the world towards the railway station and all the shops down there.

Health Issues

I sometimes wonder how much of my agoraphobia and overeating is due to my childhood experiences. One can block off memories, but the anxieties and fears don't necessarily go away. After my father committed suicide in 1958 mum had a breakdown. She was sent to hospital and my brother and I were sent to a children's home; my sister stayed with a family in St Albans. When mum was sent home well again after six weeks, neither my brother nor I was released from the children's home. My mother would go to the Social Welfare Department almost every week to ask them to send us home, but they refused.

Eventually I wrote them a letter and asked them to let us go home so we could all be together again as a family, and so that my mother would not get sick again because we were separated. Mum took this letter to Social Welfare and within two days we were sent home. We had been at the children's home

about six months. I was thirteen years old at the time.

Work History

At fourteen and fifteen I worked during school holidays and on Saturdays to bring in some extra money into the home. At sixteen I left school to go to work and earn money to help support my mother, brother and sister. At seventeen I worked three jobs to help the family as we were poor. I was giving my mother three-quarters of my wage and she was able to save some of this and we finally had water in the house when I was eighteen years old.

Between seventeen and twenty I had problems of severe depression. A car accident in which I injured my head left me with very bad headaches, but it wasn't till I collapsed at work that I went to a doctor for medical advice. That was the beginning of my tranquilliser treatment.

Despite these problems I worked as much as I could to provide some financial security for the family and also to try to put some money aside for my own future. We slowly began to make a few improvements to the house and furniture, and that was nice to see. Mum liked that.

Marriage

Marriage of Basil Vasjuta and Helena Ribarow 1966

I met my future husband, Basil Vasjuta, when I was eighteen and I was twenty when we married in 1966. It seemed only natural to live with my mother to continue supporting the family, and also for my husband and I to save enough money for a good deposit so that we could build a new home. We lived with my family for three-and-a-half years and continued to support them while my brother and sister were still at school.

At twenty-two I had my son, Paul, born in 1968. My first daughter, Christina, was born in 1971, and then Sonja was born in 1976. The 'seventies and 'eighties were my busiest years as a mother with three children to care for, but I always kept in contact with my mother and made sure she was taking care of herself.

The Tin Shed

I became more directly involved with the Tin Shed in the early 1970s after the birth of my first child. I had stopped working full time so I could devote some time to other activities. I would go to the Tin Shed to meet other young mothers and to keep in contact with friends. Lorna Cameron and Evelyn Mullenger had started up a playgroup and I would take Paul there quite often when he was a little bit older. I've always had a lot of respect for Lorna Cameron and I knew she helped a lot of people through her voluntary work. I also became a volunteer there and spent the next 25 years as part of the regular team of helpers. I had to stop when my health became too bad.

The Tin Shed was a great way of helping people. We started the first migrant English classes, and a number of Tin Shed volunteers became the tutors for people wanting to improve their English. I found that speaking Polish was useful in communicating with a variety of Slavic people.

I also started organising all our recycled clothing through our Swap Shop, as we called it. I would pull apart all the older jumpers and use the wool to crochet rugs, which were then donated to people who needed blankets. I really enjoyed the Discussion Group that would include guest speakers from all sorts of places, plus we would visit other groups in Melbourne. It was a good way of learning about lots of new developments and becoming aware of places that were able to assist people.

Because we ran all these activities people would come to ask advice; we were able to help because we had experienced the same problems ourselves and knew what worked, or where people could go to get more specialised assistance.

Mother's Cancer

Going to hospital with Mum was often an all-day exercise because of the long wait at the hospital. I didn't mind the waiting, it was the treatment when we eventually got to see a doctor that was really upsetting.

One of the worst times was when I finally convinced her to see a doctor about her gynaecological problems. It was a real problem getting her there in the first place. After waiting several hours we finally got to see someone, it turned out to be a couple of young trainees, a man and a woman, who didn't even appear to know what they were doing. They would whisper together, ask a question, then go back to whispering again. They were even smiling and laughing together. What sort of treatment is that to put anyone through?

Mum had some tests done and I had been waiting for the doctor to tell me the results. He was somewhere else, on some other floor or ward so I just had to wait. He phoned the nurse's station for something and she told him I was still waiting. When I got on the phone he told me mum had cancer. I fainted and they wanted to admit me into the hospital, so I had to explain

that I had to go home to look after three kids. It had been a shock to be told such information over the phone with no forewarning. At least he could have told me in person.

We went back to the hospital with mum to try to explain about the cancer and convince her that she needed a hysterectomy. We had told the hospital to arrange a Polish interpreter so that things could be explained to mum as clearly as possible. What we didn't anticipate was that all the hospital staff at the session would be men and the interpreter wasn't even Polish. Needless to say, when you have an elderly European women in the presence of strange men it's difficult to get her to talk about any personal matters, and certainly not about gynaecological problems. I think the situation must have been very threatening to mum. She refused to believe she had cancer and refused to have any treatment. Her health deteriorated over the next two years and eventually I brought her to my home so I could take care of her. She died in 1982.

Children's Progress

My son Paul went to the technical school and trained as an electronics technician with RMIT. He married Dawn Robinson in 1991 and they established their own home in Melton. Christina went to my old high school, now called St Albans Secondary College, but transferred to Buckley Park High School for her senior years. She then went on to study nursing at the Victoria University of Technology in St Albans and has been enjoying that as a career. Sonja went to Kealba High for her secondary education, and is now enrolled in business studies at VUT.

In 1996 Paul and Dawn had their first child, Daniel. He is my first grandchild and I take great delight in spending time with him and watching him discover the world.

Helena Vasjuta, 1996

Helena & children (L-R): Christina, Paul, Sonja, 1998

Helen died of cancer in 1998 at the age of 52.

Hannelore Henschke: Academic

Hannelore Renate Elfriede Henschke is of German background and was born in East Berlin on 30 August 1945. Her family fled to West Berlin when Hannelore was aged four years. The family came to Australia in November 1958. Her parents were Herbert Wilhelm Walter Henschke and Elfriede Steinicke. Her siblings were Juergen (born in 1941), Renate (1942), Regina (1947), and Helmut (1954).

Hannelore was a young teenager when she arrived in Melbourne and started at the St Albans High School in Form 2G; it was 1959. She was very keen and conscientious worker at school, gaining a second form English mark of 91% - an outstanding achievement after studying English for only two and a half years in Germany. Although German was her native tongue, Hannelore had a love of reading, including English literature, and became a proficient reader in German, English and French. She was a compatriot of Sneja Gunew, another German speaker, and other high school luminaries such as Rosemary Keegan and Rosemary Kiss. Hannelore was a school prefect during 1963 and was dux of the school with an Exhibition, two First Class Honours, two Second Class Honours, and three Passes. The Exhibition was for German.

Mr Ford, B Taylor, Miss Murray, I Sharp, H Henschke, I Dynak, V Deka, G Lambert. 1963.

She was accepted into Melbourne University in 1964 and was awarded the Baillieu Exhibition for French in 1965, the Mary Taylor Scholarship for Medieval French Language and Literature in 1966/67, and the Mollison Scholarship for the final examinations in Arts, French and German Studies in 1967. She received her BA (Hons) in French and German in 1968.

She continued her academic career with a lengthy dissertation (870 pages) on "Some Aspects of Ennui as Revealed in French Literature of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries". (University of Melbourne, Office of Research, 1972.)

Glenn Hilling: Childhood Memories

Glenn Hilling was a student of St Albans High School from 1964 to 1969 and prior to that he attended St Albans East Primary School (even though he tried to run away on his first day) and then St Albans North Primary School. His time at St Albans High School was more distinguished by his sporting prowess than his academic achievements.

Relishing Life

Death is a time to relish life. Death reminds us of our mortality and makes us think about our achievements and our hopes for the future. How do we wish to be remembered when we die? When my father died on 10 June, 1995, I began to reflect upon my life so far and the future.

After the funeral, my five year old daughter and I escaped the crushing sadness of the occasion to the vacant playground of St. Albans North Primary School, the school I last attended in 1963 (and the year Geelong won one of its few premierships). As she played and we raced across the asphalt netball courts, where so many years ago I first discovered that I could run quickly, it became clear what the future is. It is my daughter and her success, whatever that may be. Will I be remembered as a good father? Have I learnt from the mistakes my father made? But what of the past.

The Wild West

My parents were Norman and Mary Hilling and I was their only child. We came to Australia in 1954 from the UK under the Assisted Passenger Migration Scheme. Although I have flashes of a life before we lived in St. Albans, my clearest memories begin after my parents moved into a three-roomed bungalow in St. Albans in 1955 after paying the deposit of £182 on the total price of £885.

Our home was at 33 Fox Street (near Arthur Street) later to become 79 Fox Street when the street was extended. Our family transport was a BSA 500 motorcycle with sidecar.

These were pioneering days in Melbourne's wild west. Although only eleven miles from the city centre and linked by an electric rail service, St. Albans was an isolated place, an outer suburb with about 1,000 inhabitants, most of them immigrants from war ravaged Europe. Sprawling across the flat, wind swept Keilor plains, houses were scattered here and there, like islands in a vast sea of grass and weeds. Few trees had survived the farmers who had preceded the advance of suburbia and any trees that had the temerity to poke up above the grass were promptly pruned to ground level by the council.

Our blue weatherboard and fibro cement house stood on Fox Street, which for many years was merely a gravel road. The drains were open ditches on each side of the street bearing a delightful green scum on the surface and emitting a lovely aroma. The toilet was an outhouse and on cold, windy nights it was a frightening journey to the toilet for a child with a vivid imagination. Each week the dunny man replaced the pan and every morning I was pleasantly woken by the clip clop of horses' hooves and the clink of bottles as the milkman did his rounds.

The Summers

The summers seemed to be hotter and longer then. In the relentless heat the water supply invariably failed. The water tower for the town was placed on a low hill about half a mile from the house (near the corner of Arthur and Biggs Streets if I recall correctly). In the searing heat my mother and I would trudge up the hill to collect water and bring it home.

There seemed to be no relief from the heat in an uninsulated house and little shade outdoors. At night the house could be unbearably hot so we would take the television outside (we were one of the first families to own a television - it was 1956, an Astor on tall, spindly legs and it cost £240). If it worked in the heat, we would watch television with the accompaniment of moths and a myriad of other buzzing insects obstructing our view.

Sometimes the horizon around us would be the aglow with bushfires.

The house grew from these humble beginnings. First was a laundry at the back and next, a kitchen and bedroom at the front. Finally, a lounge and another bedroom at the front.

When sewage arrived in 1975, the toilet moved inside and with it the expression "the call of nature" lost a lot of its meaning.

Snake Tales

Although I had no brothers or sisters, I always seemed to be in the company of animals, both domesticated and wild. We had a succession of chickens, cats and for about ten years, a pug named Julius. And there were the snakes.

I often played in a paddock behind a nearby poultry farm, rolling in the long grass, flattening it and luxuriating in the fresh smells. Occasionally there were other rustling noises in the grass, but I preferred not to notice them. One day I found out what was causing them. Some other children found an old sheet of corrugated iron lying in the grass and turned it over. Underneath it was a squirming mass of snakes. I do not know if they were tiger, black or brown snakes. We were just running away as fast as we could to take any notice.

Snakes were abundant in the area and we had one cat who was very adept in collecting them. He would wander off in to the paddocks surrounding our house and return hours later carrying a small, live snake in his mouth. He would trot up to the back door and scratch at the screen door for someone to share his booty. It was my mother who always came to the door, to find the cat and a wriggling snake at the door step. I do not think the cat ever understood why these presents were never appreciated. Unfortunately, these hunting trips were short lived. He must have been bitten one day and we did not know about it until that night. While sleeping on top of the television, he went into convulsions and died.

Snakes were also an unwelcome visitor to our chook house located in the backyard, well away from the house. Some mornings my mother would find a surprise visitor when she went out to collect the eggs. My father would respond to her call for help by emerging from the house with his .22 calibre rifle or an axe and execute the snake that had raided the chook house for a breakfast egg. Sometimes it would be a blue tongue lizard gorging itself on an egg, but my mother would only see the tail and the poor lizard would suffer the same fate as the snakes. After the intruder was safely despatched I would wander over and have a closer look, feeling particularly brave if it was a snake or very sad if it was a harmless lizard.

The Great Rat Massacre

Our neighbours possessed enough poultry and other livestock on their quarter acre block to qualify as a farm. It was illegal, but my parents turned a blind eye. With the poultry kept in makeshift enclosures sitting on bare earth, rats moved in and thrived. Most mornings we would find the remains of rats strewn about the backyard, the proceeds of a fruitful night's hunting by our cats. But my mother was not impressed and she decided to take matters into her own hands.

With the help of the neighbour she proceeded to fill in the numerous openings to the network of underground chambers that the rats had created, until there was only one opening left. At this point her lack of planning became apparent. Not really certain what to do next, she decided to stuff a hose down the opening, turn on the water and see if she could drown the rats. The entire rat population, realising the dire consequences of this action, decided to evacuate en masse. They stormed out of the opening, big and small, young and old, and scattered in all directions. This may have saved them from drowning, but they were now enclosed in the poultry enclosure and could not escape. They scurried back and forth searching for an escape route. This must have been a frightening experience for all parties involved. My father heard the screams and ran out of the house with the rifle. He vaulted the fence into the enclosure and began shooting the rats. It soon became a massacre and my father killed many of them before he made a painful mistake.

He took aim at one rat scurrying towards him. However, by the time he fired, the rat was on his foot and my father quite literally shot himself in the foot. I guess he was lucky it was only a .22 calibre bullet filled with pellet shot. The wound soon healed, but for years later, pellets would burst out of blisters as they came to the surface.

Glen Hilling, Form 5, 1968 (second row from back, second from right).

The Christmas Pig

Our neighbours were a constant source of annoyance. Shortly after the great rat massacre our neighbours acquired a pig. This was to be Christmas dinner for them. As the fateful day approached the pig must have sensed something was up when his human owners

began prodding him and salivating at the thought of the feast to come. He decided to escape. One day the fat porker crashed through our dilapidated fence into our backyard and started running around causing havoc amongst our chooks. My father promptly appeared with the rifle and executed the pig, much to the chagrin of the neighbours. Their complaints fell on deaf ears. After all, my father was holding the rifle.

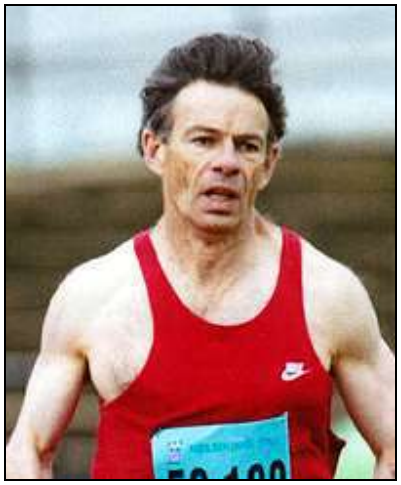
Back to the Future

This is a small sample of my childhood memories. They may seem like adventures now, but they were hardships at the time. In some ways it is a pity that my daughter will not experience these adventures. Modern day Watsonia is a far cry from the St. Albans of my childhood, but we are living in times of constant and rapid change. I hope that in forty years time my daughter will write fondly of her childhood.

Glenn Hilling, June 1996.

Summary of placings at athletics competitions:

- Victorian Champs 400m. semi-finalist (1972 & 73).
- Albion A.A.C. Champion (1972 & 73)
- Coburg Harriers Most Consistent (1974 & 82).
- Pudding Gift winner (1977, 1978 & 1981).
- Jingle Jog winner (1996).
- World Masters Games 2002 (Finalist M50 400 & 800m).
- Corporate Cup Spring 2002 (M50+ Challenge Race 2nd).
- Corporate Cup Spring 2002 (M50+ Aggregate Time 3rd).
- CP Fitness Centre Greyhound Award 2002.
- 2004 Vic. Relay Champs Gold (M50+ 4x100 & 4x400m).
- 2008 Eltham Fun Run (M50+ 5km 2nd).



Glenn Hilling, World Masters Games, Olympic Park, 2001

Gwen Kratis Nee Honey: Telephonist, Homemaker, Pioneer Descendant

I was born in 1950 and my mum was Winifred Stenson who married John Honey. Mum was born in 1914 and she was one of four daughters of Frederick and Eva Stenson. My aunts were Em, Al, and Ruby, who were all born in St Albans and all grew up in the big family home known as Keighlo. I have two older brothers, Fred and John. Fred was born in 1944 and John in 1946. Both my brothers have retired to the country; one is in Port Fairy and the other near Bairnsdale.

I remember St Albans when it was still a small town – there were fewer houses and lots of paddocks around. The shops were mostly near the railway station, along Main Road and East Esplanade. People still drove horses. I remember there were horses at the back of the Keighlo property and I have photos of my brothers sitting on a horse when they were quite young.

Grandparents

My granddad had a horse and cart and would go and visit Auntie Al who was living in Taylors Road where there were several farms. She was married to Fred Anderson and they had a farm along Taylors Road. Like my granddad, Fred's parents were some of the early settlers in the area who took up farming. In fact several of the Anderson sons became local farmers.

Eva and Frederick Stenson, pioneers from 1880s

My grandparents were Frederick and Eva Stenson. Grandpa came from England in 1888 to help his uncle on the farm near the Maribyrnong River. He was involved in many things around St Albans, such as the Anglican Church, the Mechanics Hall and the St Albans

Progress Association. I was quite young when he died so I don't remember very much about him. He was on the Keilor council for many years but retired a few years before I was born. He was living in Keighlo until he died and the Catholic Church bought the house and let us stay there for a while when they were building the school. The Catholic Church and the Sacred Heart School were built right opposite Keighlo. I still have a photograph of the old house not long after it was built by the Padleys, and it was the biggest house in town at the time. My grandparents lived in that house for about fifty years. Grandpa died in 1958. Grandma Stenson had died about ten years earlier so I never knew her at all, but mum said she had grown up in North Melbourne. After Grandpa died the Catholic Church renovated the old house and that became the home for the priests.

Winifred Stenson

My mum was Winifred Stenson and she was the youngest of the Stenson daughters. She was involved with St Alban the Martyr Church near the crossing to the old primary school. My grandfather Fred Stenson was one of the people who helped build the original church in the early 1900s and was a lifelong member. Mum was the treasurer at the church for some time and also ran some of their social and fundraising events. Auntie Em was their organist for many years.

The old church burnt down when I was about 10. I was born in 1950, so it must have burnt down in the late fifties or early sixties.

Mum helped establish a branch of the Australian Red Cross Society and completed a first aid course with them in 1940; I still have her Red Cross certificate. She was on the advisory committee at the St Albans North Primary School when I was there. She was on that for a few years until I went to the high school. Mum was a singer and had a beautiful voice. I remember times where Aunt Em was playing the piano and mum singing. They were both linked strongly to the Anglican Church of St. Alban the Martyr.

Mum did not age well and later developed Alzheimers. Dad wanted to move to a retirement home but mum was set on staying at home as long as she could. She was very comfortable in her home and seldom left it. She passed away about 1997.

Jack Honey

My father was John Edward Honey but everyone knew him as Jack. He grew up in Footscray and was a blacksmith with the railways in his working years. He became a foreman and was very well respected by his colleagues. His team installed rail tracks and signals. He was very proud of his work and in particular the fact that he and mum were awarded free public transport anywhere in Victoria for life. He would proudly show people his pass but the funny thing is that he used it only a few times. He didn't drink or smoke and, like my grandfather, served on the Keilor Council.

Not long before he passed away the Council named a street in St Albans East after him - Honey Grove.

Winifred and Jack Honey in retirement

He was a keen vegetable gardener and regularly went to the Senior Citizens in St Albans. He sold his veggies there to raise money for the club. Every Tuesday he would do the shopping at Selfs, as he would call it, which is now the IGA, for himself and Auntie Em. He passed away of a heart attack at home in his sleep about 1991.

Aunt Emily

My aunt Em, Emily Hall, enjoyed much better health than my mum – probably because she had no kids! She was very active and had many friends who would visit her in her William Street home. Her house was very basic with a wood stove that she still used and no hot water in the kitchen. She married Frank Hall from

Sydenham who built the house. He later passed away fishing at Pykes Creek before my son was born. When the house was sold the real estate board read “The last cottage in St Albans.” It was later knocked down for units.

Aunt Em lived alone for many years with her dog and a back yard with chickens. When she worked on the farm in Stenson Road she worked as hard as any man. She loved going to the Senior Citz Club as a social outing. I would take the children to her house on Saturdays and she would really spoil them. Aunt Em was the last of the Stenson daughters to pass away. She died about 2000 not long after mum. The reverend gave a fantastic ceremony at her funeral as he visited her every week for years and years and knew her like family.

When I was growing we were living on the corner of William and Arthur streets near the old water tanks not far from my grandparents’ place. I have a photo of my brothers with the horse before the old house was sold. The horses were kept at the back of Keighlo because it had a big paddock as the back yard. Aunt Em was living in Williams Street and Aunt Al was on a farm in Taylors Road, which was further away.

Primary School

It was all unmade roads around us and there were no gutters but there were a lot of pot holes in the streets. When I first went to school there was still just the original primary school and that was in West Esplanade across the railway line from where we were living. It was crowded with children from all parts of Europe so you really noticed how multicultural St Albans was becoming. Then I went to the St Albans North Primary when they built that. That was up in Fox Street. Lucia Harricot was a school mate of mine there and we had some good times as friends. Mr Blain was the principal and I remember him because he used to hold school assemblies every Monday morning.

Mr Ginifer was a teacher at the school when I was there. He was later elected as the local Member of Parliament and they named the railway station at Furlong Road after him. He died unexpectedly and when they built the new station they named it after him as a memorial. That’s why it’s called Ginifer Station. That was in the early eighties.

St Albans High School

There was only one high school in St Albans in the ’fifties and that was in Main Road East. I started there in 1964. Mr Torpey was the headmaster when I started going there. He was alright as a headmaster but I don’t remember any other teachers in particular. I didn’t play any sports or anything like that at school; I mainly spent time with my friends. Margaret Watson lived near us and we’d get together for company. We enjoyed going to the Sunshine swimming pool, which was the closest one at the time. That was when I was about twelve. We’d catch the train to Sunshine and the pool wasn’t far from the station.

Both my brothers went to the St Albans High School. My older brother Fred started there in 1957, which was the year it first opened in Main Road East. He liked sports and played football and cricket at the high school. Fred started playing football with the St Albans Police Youth Club team at Errington Reserve, and then for the St Albans Football Club in the ’sixties. He must have taken after my father’s side of the family, because Norman Honey was a good football player. My other brother John was not so much involved in sports apart from school sports.

1960 House Captains. Fred Honey in back row second from right

Working in the city

I was only a few years at the high school and then went to work. At first I worked in a handbag factory in the city. I would take the train to the city. It was messy work because you worked with glues. I was there a few years. There were quite a few people working there because there were the machinists and the bench hands and there was also a despatch section. Every one had a particular job to do and I worked as a bench hand, which meant putting the linings into the bags. After that job I worked in the telephone exchange for a few years, which was also in the city, in Little Bourke Street. I was there about five years and finished in about 1972. Working as a telephonist was much nicer than the work in the bag factory. After that I worked as a clerical assistant with Telecom on the corner of Collins and Elizabeth Street; it was known as the Postmaster-General’s Department or PMG when I started. I was there also about five years, but after I got married and had my first child I stopped working there so that I could look after my son at home.

Marrying Zenny Kratsis

I had married Zenny Kratsis in 1973. We had met through the St Albans Football Club at one of their social events. My brother Fred played for the football club in the ’sixties. The club held a dance at the Church of England Hall and that’s where I met Zenny. His parents were of Greek background and migrated to Australia in the

'fifties. Zenny was quite young when they arrived here. He later worked at Angliss Meatworks, which was in Footscray.

Marriage of Gwen Honey and Zenny Kratsis

After we married we lived in Norman Street. We had two children, Wayne and Jill. When they were little it was easy to take them on visits to my mum's place or Auntie Em's because we were all still living in St Albans. Mum adored seeing her grandchildren and Aunty Em had no children so she enjoyed our visits. Wayne now works in local government with the parks and gardens department. Jill became a naturopath and settled in Woodend. She liked athletics when she was young and I still have some of the certificates she received in her running competitions.

In Conclusion

My brother John ended up working for the RSPCA in the office. We always had a dog or two as pets and he always liked animals so he joined the RSPCA and ended up working for the Lort Smith Animal Shelter. He's retired now and living by the sea in Port Fairy. My other brother Fred became a bank manager, and he's retired as well. He was with Westpac for many years and worked as a branch manager, which meant he usually worked in different places. He has now settled down in Kalimna, which is in country Victoria out past Bairnsdale towards Lakes Entrance.

Gwen Kratsis nee Honey, 2013

Helen Hoskin nee Czernik: Public Servant, Family Day Carer

I was born in Melbourne in November 1951. My parents came to Australia in March 1950 with my brother Otto, who was 16 months old. My mother was Annelise Hellmuth (born in 1927) and my father Wladimir Czernik (born in 1911). Mum was German and Dad was Polish-Ukrainian. He met Mum after the war in Germany.

Our Home

After arriving in Australia the family first lived in migrant camps at Bonegilla and Broadmeadows, then moved to 149 Fox Street, St Albans. We lived in a bungalow which was only the sleeping quarters of two bedrooms for the four of us.

Dad slowly built onto the bungalow. It still amazes me how he knew what to do. Nothing seemed too difficult: building the frame, putting in windows, doors, plastering, plumbing, and flooring. It all seemed to come naturally.

Then we had a one-room shed that comprised of a kitchen, bathroom, and laundry. It was made mostly of cement sheet and didn't have much room so it got pretty crowded with everything and everybody in there. I still remember the kitchen table which Dad obviously put together - definitely not your modern table with elegant legs and matching chairs. Mum would boil the water in the copper for us to use the bath and do the washing.

I don't remember a fridge or cooking facilities. And naturally we had the outside dunny, waste being collected once a week.

Childhood Memories

The good memories of my childhood include always having neighbouring children to play with. Fox Street back then was an unmade road and with not many cars around we could play there safely. (My parents never had a car.)

My family was very sociable so we often had other families visiting us. I still recall dad putting on records, the old 78s. Memories flood

back if you happen to hear one of those songs, mainly in German.

Mum had a great garden of vegies and flowers. She always kept chickens and slaughtered them herself. After she'd killed them she'd dunk them into hot water to make plucking easier. I still remember that smell of wet feathers - not nice.

Billy carts were a big thing - all in a row we would go on adventures, taking our snacks with us (usually one biscuit). When I look back now time had no limit.

We played ball games in the street, also played marbles, skipped, and rode bikes. Of course we had no TV, so we made our own fun. I think I was about twelve when we finally got a TV.

Primary School

I started school at the 'old' primary school in West Esplanade, unable to speak a word of English. We spoke German at home.

In Grade 1, I had an eye injured in the school yard and I was blinded in my right eye. Looking back now, there was no ambulance so the headmaster drove me home, then my mum and I walked to Doctor O'Brien's office. I was then told I needed to go to the hospital. Mum then took me to the train and we went to the Eye and Ear Hospital in the city. It makes me realise how tough we were.

I started at the North Primary School in Fox Street in Grade 2. Between our house and the school was a creek and if it rained heavily the road flooded and we were unable to get to school.

Helen (middle row, 4th from left) Grade 6

The only teachers I remember from that school were Mr Ginifer (after whom the railway station between St Albans and Albion was named) in Grade 5, and Mr Canning in Grade 6. One thing I remember I did in primary school was to get two shillings out of my money box without mum knowing, and buying a bag of mixed lollies. It was a large bag and I shared it with friends.

In Grade 4 we used pens with nibs that were dipped into ink, and we had little ink wells on the corner of our desk. I presume we all had turns at filling everyone's ink well.

Sport at primary school was rounders. We also learnt folk dancing. My friends at school were Stephania Osoba (she lived next door) and Marion Mueller. In Grade 6 I sat next to Vlad Lenc, whom I still see occasionally, as he married a friend of mine, Irene Jozwik.

I distinctly remember milk being delivered by horse and cart in bottles that had foil lids, and at Xmas we'd have decorated foil lids. When I was sixteen I stayed up all night at New Years Eve party and we greeted the milkman as he came along the road. The family next door had a pet magpie who followed their son everywhere. The only problem was it liked the shiny foil lids on the milk bottles and would peck them. I don't know how they resolved that problem.

Interacting with Neighbours

Two houses up at 153 Fox Street lived the Shelley family (with two sons, Roger and Wayne) whom I befriended and became their 'daughter'. I spent many hours at their place, enjoying their company. I often think of my enjoyment there was because we saw them as being Australian (they were in fact British migrants) and had totally different values and ideas to my European parents. My father was a very controlling and generally a negative person, always worrying about what other people would think.

My mother was always anxious to keep my father happy so he wouldn't have anything to complain about - which is why I escaped to the Shelley household. In their home there was

always laughter and positive energy. They also had a phone, which I would go and use. We didn't have a phone at home until I was nearly eighteen years old.

The Shelleys' life changed when Mick (dad) retired. He and Hazel (mum) moved to Torquay. (Mick and Hazel have since died.) Wayne (who is married with a son) bought the family home. Roger (the eldest son) now lives in Torquay, and I still see him occasionally.

Religion

Dad was Catholic, Mum was Lutheran. On Sundays Mum went to her church as they had a German Service. Dad made Otto and I go to the Catholic Church (he stayed at home). As we went to a state primary school we had to attend Catholic religious instruction either after school or on Saturdays, so we could do our Communion. We eventually stopped going to Catholic Church, though I would go with Mum to her Church. I eventually got married in an Anglican Church.

Friendships

Joseph Ribarow is a friend of my bother Otto. (I think they met at secondary school.) One day Joe brought his sister, Teresa, to our home and we became friends. Teresa and I went to different primary schools but became firm friends by secondary school.

Everyone should have a friend like Terrie come into their lives, someone who is always there whether you break up with your boyfriend or your husband, argue with your children or when your parents die, and many more times. She stood by and never judged me, just gently supported me until I came out the other end. Terrie is still in my life and sometimes I am sad we don't live closer, with her in Geelong and me in Emerald.

High School

What do I remember about secondary school? I made a lot of friends, Monica Chlewicki and Janina Jozwick being two with whom I am still in contact.

Uniforms, as even now, weren't favoured, either being too long or wide. I remember wearing gloves and berets with our winter uniforms, especially on excursions. We all went by train to the Olympic Pool and to the city for athletics and sport events. These were the times that uniforms had to be spot on.

Sewing and Cookery classes were my favourites, and both played major roles in my life. I continued sewing and made most of my clothes and eventually my children's. Cookery classes were well worth while as my mother's cooking skills weren't great. When I married I continued enjoying cooking and experimenting with many recipes. I also enjoyed eating the food I prepared.

Accessing your locker between classes could be a real challenge. There were three tiers and I was lucky as I generally had one at the top. I always felt sorry for the students on the bottom level battling to get their books out past everyone's legs.

Helen Czernik (middle of third row from front) with Mrs Kriksciunas and Form 4d, 1967.

When I was at secondary school I started a part-time job on Saturdays in a shop which sold Australian souvenirs. I worked out the back sewing purses and other items made out of Kangaroo leather. The shop was a few doors down from Ungers Newsagency and next door to the record shop that did TV and radio repairs; my brother worked as an apprentice to the owner of that business.

Tracing Lost Relatives

With the help of Red Cross, my father decided to locate any living relatives, as after the war he had married my mum and stayed in Germany rather than go back to his home region which now under communist control. He eventually established contact with two brothers and discovered that he had a son from a previous

marriage before the war. So, when I was twelve I discovered I had a half-brother, Frank.

For reasons I don't know, my father refused to go overseas to see his son and the Soviet authorities wouldn't allow Frank to come out to Australia and be part of our family.

My father died without ever having seen his first son. Through friends of the family Mum kept in contact with Frank and we helped him financially for many years. Eventually, I don't know how, Frank saved for a flight to Australia, but was allowed here for only three weeks. We kept him busy visiting and sightseeing. I bought Russian/Ukrainian/English dictionary, which was how we communicated with him. Frank finally got to see his father's grave and it was a very emotional time for him.

Working for the Public Service

I left secondary school at the end of Form 4 (now Year 10). I got a job with the public service with the Department of Supply as a clerical assistant. My role was lots of filing, proof reading, photo copying, and collating. I also took turns in running the switchboard, i.e. receiving incoming calls and directing them to the appropriate extension, and in being the tea lady. This meant pushing a trolley through the office and handing out coffee and tea. Over the years we eventually had women employed just to make the coffee and tea.

When I first started work we were paid fortnightly, and my pay was $36. I used to smoke back then and a packet of Malboro cost 60c.

We had a great social life as many of us were of similar age. We had lots of celebrations at the corner hotel during our lunchtimes at there was always a twenty-first, engagement, or wedding. We often had trouble getting back to work when lunch break was over. We also socialised out of work: barbecues, football games, cricket, car rallies, or evening parties at different homes. That was also the time when Progressive Dinners were popular.

Marriage

I met my husband, David Hoskin, at work. We married in February 1972 and both continued working together for a few years. I eventually went to work for the Department of Defence. While I was still with the Department of Supply, Irene Lenc (Jozwik) came to work with us. Irene's sister was my friend at secondary school. Irene and I became good friends, and still are.

My husband and I bought a house in Oakleigh and took the train to work. We spent a lot of family time with David's Mum, Dad, his brothers and their families. I learnt a lot from these people as they were all Australians and again had a different background to my European parents.

During our time together David and I had many camping trips. We honeymooned in Tasmania. David enjoyed fishing as I would generally read a good book. We drove to Darwin, a real adventure as they'd had bad weather resulting in very muddy roads. This was before the road to Darwin was sealed. We also went to New Zealand, hiring a car in both the south and north islands. We did a lot of camping around Victoria as we both loved the outdoors and both found nature very rewarding. This was always a big adventure for me, because as a child I almost never left St Albans.

Just when I got pregnant we'd bought a ten-acre property in Emerald and sold our home in Oakleigh. Living in Emerald was beautiful but to get to our jobs in the city was very time consuming. We'd get up at 5:30am to be in the city just after 8:00am. We found driving to Belgrave then catching the train, which took one hour ten minutes, the best way. I'd either read or knit on the journey. At one stage David and another guy played Backgammon on the journey. (They had many interested onlookers.)

I left work to have Emily, born in August 1979, so I had completed ten years in the public service.

Weekends on the ten acres were spent picking Proteas and foliage, which we bunched and the sold to florists. We also grew a lot of our own vegetables. I learnt how to bottle, pickle, and freeze bucketloads of vegies. We also had a lot of fruit trees so making jam, marmalades and sauces was another time filler.

David left the public service two years after me and took up a postal round in Ferny Creek. I eventually shared this job.

We survived Ash Wednesday in January 1983. It was a very frightening time. I remember doing the postal round that day and you could just feel the heat and sense that a bushfire was imminent.

In August '84 we had our son Simon. I gave up delivering letters and eventually started providing Family Day Care through the local council. Minding children in my own home meant I could earn extra money but be home with my children. I have continued this job till the present, but have made a decision to stop in February 2006. What's ahead for me?

In 1993 David and I separated but I have continued living in Emerald as it feels like home to me and I love living in the hills. Simon continued living with me while Emily went back and forth to her dad's. Emily eventually came back to live with me when she became pregnant. Megan, my granddaughter, was born in September 1996. They both lived with me for three years. I feel so lucky to have had those

years with Megan to bond with. When Emily left she generally lived close by so I had Megan in care.

Current Situation

Having my eye injury in Grade 1 was the beginning of continued hospitalisation, doctors' appointments, and lots of ointments and drops. In 1998 the eye became infected and it was recommended that I have it out. It was a decision only I could make, but I agreed. I now have a prosthesis that looks like the real thing but unfortunately for me my body keeps trying to reject it. Again, it means more surgery and lots of ointments and drops.

This last year has been an emotional ride with Emily and Megan moving to Tatura. I miss them very much. Emily married Ross Downie and now they are expecting twins. Megan at the age of nine years writes me lovely letters.

My son Simon turned 21 this year; another milestone. He has a job in a small business making specialised lenses for cameras.

I also had a relationship breakdown this year, which was difficult and painful. I have realised that finding the right person at our age is difficult as we are very set in our ways. I haven't given up hope in finding the right person to spend my life with. In the meantime I will keep up with my interests in life, which are my children, bush walking, gardening, reading, doing puzzles, my pets, and enjoying my many friends socially.

Helen Hoskin, 2012

Helen with friends celebrating her 60th birthday 2005

Wendy Hounslow: Pioneer Descendent, Homemaker

I was one of the first students of the St Albans High School when it was established in 1956 - the classes were held in the Presbyterian Church Hall in Anderson Street, Sunshine, in that first year. My parents were Raymond and Mary Hounslow of Main Road East, St Albans. They supported the high school from the very beginning as my father was on the school's inaugural Advisory Council and my mother was on the Parents and Friends Association.

We were a local family and related to the Erringtons of The Esplanade and the Lewises of Walter Street, so the family origins in Australia go back to the mid 1800s and my parents were in the district in the early 1900s. We had a number of other relatives around St Albans during the fifties and sixties including the Priests and McIntyres, to whom we were related through marriage.

The Hounslow Family

My Father, Raymond William Hounslow, was born in 1903 and by the late 1920s had a furniture factory in Main Road East, St Albans. This was built jointly with his father William Hounslow. It was known as W. J. Hounslow and Sons. When the Depression came the business folded and Dad started selling petrol on the property and many people remember it being the first Petrol Pump in the area. He sold this business to the Self family in 1933 when they were setting up their own store. He then later on received employment with Nettlefolds in Sunshine as a storeman and remained there till 1963.

The "shell" of the furniture factory became a home over the years. It was built from parts of the old factory and went on to become a "California" style home which still stands today but not at its original address which was 33 Main Road East, St Albans.

My father married Mary Lewis on the 21st August 1937. Mary was the eldest child of Thomas and Elizabeth Lewis of Walter Street, St Albans. My Dad during his childhood lived in the Esplanade at the home owned by his aunt Mrs Alice Errington. She was a sister of his father

and she took in the children of the family when Dad's mother passed away in 1917. Coral was born on the 10th October 1939 and Wendy born 1st August 1944. (We had a brother born 18th September 1941 but he passed away at 6 weeks.) We attended St Albans Primary School which was in West Esplanade just up the road from the old Errington home.

Where the Hounslow house was on the corner of Collins Street and Main Road East is now a Woolworths Supermarket. Over the years this quiet area we all knew became a very busy shopping strip. The Arcade was next door and more shops started being built opposite us including Unger's Milk Bar and Newsagency, the Commonwealth Bank, the Foodland Supermarket, Joe Loccisano's Fruit Shop etc. These were big changes. The street became a Main Road in more ways then just the name.

The Lewis Family

My mother's parents were Elizabeth and Thomas Lewis. They had the poultry farm on the corner of William and Walter streets, St Albans. He was from Williamstown and she was from Deer Park. My Grandfather was Welsh and came to St Albans in 1892. He was connected with the Presbyterian Church as superintendent of the Sunday School.

I am told that during the thirties Thomas Lewis was Chairman of the St Albans Severance Committee - the group that wanted to break away from Keilor and join Braybrook to get better value for ratepayers. This attempt at severance obviously did not work. Mum had six sisters and one brother: David, Helena, Gwladys, Jessie, Margaret and Betty. They are all deceased. Over the years four families lived in the Walter Street home: Mary Hounslow's grandmother, Jane Johnson, sister Jessie and Alan Priest, sister Helena and Harry Minns, and sister Betty McIntyre.

Mary Ellen Lewis married Raymond Hounslow in 1937 and they had three children: Coral, Raymond (deceased) and Wendy. David Stephen Lewis married Doris and they had three children: Lorraine, Doris and David. Helena Lavinia Lewis married Harry Minns and their children were: David, Ian, Elizabeth, Christine and Sheryl. Gwladys Muriel Lewis married Jim Arden and their children were Douglas and Thomas. Margaret Lewis married Len Rae and their children were Joan and Beryl. Jessie Martha Lewis married Alan Priest and their children were Elaine and Robert. Betty Lewis married Thomas McIntyre and they had no children.

The Errington Family

Mrs Alice Errington, after whom Errington Reserve is named, was my great-aunt: she was Alice Hounslow who was born 1864 in Campbellfield. Her brothers were George Albert, William James (my grandfather), and Arthur Thomas, and her sisters were Annie Elizabeth, Emily, and Eliza Hester; so it was a large family and they mainly settled around Campbellfield and Broadmeadows. Alice Hounslow married William Errington of St Albans in 1893 and they had a son Robert Errington who was born in 1901. They lived in a big house called Strathalbyn on the Esplanade west of the railway line. Alice was connected with the Presbyterian church that was over the railway line on the corner of Circus East and Elaine Street. She was an instructor at their Sunday School classes.

William Errington died in 1907 and Alice remained a widow and raised her son Bobby on her own. But she also took on the children of her brother William (my grandfather) when his wife, Amy Alice Day, died in 1917. These children were Rupert, Constance, Raymond (my father), Beatrice, Edward and Joseph (all deceased). Alice passed away in 1931, so I never knew her personally. Bobby Errington moved to Sunshine about 1950 and died in 1973.

Probably the biggest donation that Alice Errington made to St Albans was the farmland she had in Main Road East that is now the sports ground known as Errington Reserve. That was six acres of land that she donated in 1910 and it became the home of cricket, football, tennis, scouts and other youth club activities.

Family History

My parents were Raymond William Hounslow and Mary Ellen Lewis. My father married Mary Lewis on the 21st August 1937 after a ten-year courtship, due to the Depression and no work being available for many. He came from a family of seven children. They lost their mother in 1917 after the last child was born and they went to live with their father's sister, Mrs Alice Errington in St Albans. They remained with her for a few years till, as they got older, they moved on to look after themselves. Hence Dad becoming a carpenter and builder. They built churches in Victoria (places unknown) and later had the furniture factory which became our home.

My mother was Mary Ellen Lewis who was the eldest daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Lewis of Walter Street, St Albans. My Mum and Dad had a daughter Coral born 1939, a son Raymond born and deceased 1940, and Wendy born 1944.

My mother's father came to St Albans in 1890 and was a poultry farmer like many in the area. The poultry farm was on the corner of

Walter and William streets, St Albans. Their grandmother also lived close by on the opposite corner along with two more houses that had family living in them. Mary being the eldest of seven children which meant there were lots of family in the area and many family functions were held in our home. Two of my aunts lived at different times in these homes over the years. So lots of family were around when I was growing up.

We as children attended St Albans Primary School which was in the West Esplanade just up the road from the old 'Errington' home that my Dad had lived in as a child. When Coral finished school there in 1951 she went to Footscray Girls School because there was no secondary school in the local area. I finished primary school in 1955 and enrolled in the St Albans High School that was starting in 1956. We began classes in the Presbyterian Church Hall in Sunshine. Mr James Barker was the Headmaster and his wife Bernice was also a teacher at the school.

Wendy Hounslow (front row, second from right) St Albans High School Form 1B, 1956.

In 1957 the new high school was built in Main Road East, so it was just a short walk for me to get to school each morning. My sister Coral married in February 1961 and later lived in New South Wales and Queensland as her husband was in the RAAF. My father Raymond died in December 1961.

I married Phil Taylor and went to West Australia to live in 1965 - while there my mother had an offer for our house and land so our home was moved to a location down Main Road East, St Albans. It remains there to this day. It is nearly opposite the St Albans High School at 168 Main Rd East and owned by the Good Shepherd Group. They are using it for getting different people together and playgroups for little ones. The Woolworths supermarket is now where our old home was.

My Mother died in 1987 after living in Laverton and later in Hoppers Crossing with my family for her remaining years.

Back to St Albans

My married name is Wendy Taylor. I have lived in Hoppers Crossing and now Wyndham Vale since returning from West Australia where I lived after being married to Phil Taylor in 1965.

I do not visit St Albans much these days except to see old friends and remember how it was. I have read lots of stories in the St Albans history books and lots of memories come back in doing that. The photo exhibition that was held at the Tin Shed on Errington Reserve a few years ago was really good to see.

On one of our visits to St Albans we had a bonus, our old Home was looking like it's Old Self again. Previously it had been looking a bit sad as it had been moved to its present location but nothing had been done to it. Now it was owned and cared for by the Good Shepherd Group. They use it for getting people together that may be new to Australia or just in need of help. It gave me a boost after losing so much of my family from this area to think one small bit of it was still there.

My Father built this house from the remains of the Family Furniture Factory that he had that went broke during the Depression. He slowly converted it to our home. I have talked to the people of Good Shepherd who own it now and they say it has a warm homely feeling.

Wendy and Phil Taylor at High School reunion.

Frans Janssen: Programmer, Analyst, Biosecurity Officer

My name is Frans Janssen and this is my Life Story. Writing it has been one of the most difficult exercises that I have had to do: I would sit there with claws hovering but get writer's block. However, once I started, memories flooded in and it became hard to decide which to exclude. Some memories were painful to remember, others gave me great joy - LIFE.

I was born in Rotterdam, Holland, and my parents were Cornelis Janssen and Juliana Alida Janssen (nee Ten Have). My siblings were Hans Janssen and Edith Theresia Adriana Janssen. We arrived in 1952 under the Netherlands Australian Assisted Migration program. The ship stopped at Fremantle, Adelaide, and Melbourne and terminated at Sydney. At each port Mum and Dad went ashore and checked the area for possibilities. They liked Melbourne, but continued to Sydney to see what it was like. While on the way Sydney suffered a fierce storm and local flooding, and this convinced them that they should return to Melbourne. We disembarked on 3 March 1952 at Sydney and spent some time in Bathurst NSW in a migrant camp (not sure how long). The name Bonegilla comes to mind. Then we moved to a migrant camp in Maribyrnong Victoria (not sure how long) before moving to St Albans into a small cottage in Alexina Street. Finally we moved to 18 Erica Street.

Immigration

I am unsure of the reason for my parent's migration, though I do remember hearing Mum and Dad talk about family issues. Dad once said he was leaving due to family problems and that they considered America, but he decided to come to Australia. I've only met one member of my parent's family, once, when an Auntie came to stay around the time my brother married. There are no memories of the trip. I did have a birthday on the Red Sea on our way to Australia. This was when I got a stuffed dog for a present. I managed to keep that dog until after my first year of marriage when the real dog we got shredded it when he found it in the cupboard.

Dad was a fully-qualified electrician in Holland and he also owned an ice-cream shop which mum ran for him during the week, he worked there on weekends. On arrival in Australia he was told his qualifications were not recognised and he would have to return to school to obtain qualifications. Dad went to school and obtained his B-Grade license, meaning he could not work alone, he would need to be supervised by an A-Grade Electrician. He would need another year to get his A-Grade; he was dis-heartened and didn't want to waste time as he had to earn a living to support the family. Mum had been the primary support while Dad went to school. Dad was offered a partnership with a friend in an Electrical business but he would need to get his A-Grade License. Dad declined and then commenced work for the SEC at their Yarraville Depot. He stayed with the SEC until retirement.

St Albans

We initially lived in a small cottage in Alexina Street. When we moved in we only had the clothes which were in the luggage for the journey to Australia, all the rest of our belongings were in a large crate which still had to arrive. The cottage consisted of three rooms, a small back room with two bunk beds, a central living room and a small kitchen at the front. When we moved into the cottage we went to a farm somewhere near the Northern end of Arthur Street and got straw. This was used to fill large sacks and was to be our mattresses until the rest of our luggage arrived.

There is only one memory burned into my mind from this time. It was the night after our crate arrived and Dad had started to unpack and move items into the cottage. The kids slept in the two bunks, sister on the top bunk and my brother and I shared the lower bunk, Mum and Dad slept in the living room. That night I woke feeling something move across my chest, it was an enormous spider about the size of an adult hand. It crossed over me then across my brother's chest and onto the wall, at which time I woke my brother. We screamed for Dad. He saw the spider and got a hammer and hit the spider. I can still remember hearing the cracking sound. Dad said it was not a local spider as it was too big; it could have entered the crate at any of the ports the ship had stopped at on the journey. To this day, I still have an aversion to spiders.

Dad purchased a block of land in Erica Street with an option to buy the block next door. This option he allowed to lapse, much to his regret years later. Dad commenced building the new family home. I don't have many memories regarding this time. There is one which is more of a memory of what I was told years later. We were always told not to play in the house frame while Dad was building, but as kids do, when no-one was looking we did. One time I was knocked unconscious by a beam that had dropped from

the rafters. I was leaning over a floor joist and it hit me on the back of the head and rolled me over the joist onto the ground. Dad raced me to the doctor, where I was revived. Appears it was lucky I was swinging on the beam and was rolled over - least resistance, least damage.

The house was designed and built by Dad. The house was an L shape with a garage offset at the back. The garage also contained the laundry which consisted of a copper boiler and two troughs with a clothes roller between. There was a path next to the garage leading to the outhouse, which was behind the garage. Dad put scoria down this path so that anyone in the outhouse would be warned if the night soil collector came. The back yard contained a chook pen and a vegetable garden. We tried to grow fruit trees for years without much success.

Mum and Dad lived there until circa 1973 when they bought a home in Rosebud. Dad had retired and enjoyed walking his dog along the beach. He loved living there, but got a bit grumpy during summer when the holiday makers occupied the beach camping areas.

Disintegration

I suspect there must be an ancient family predisposition to family disputes as we seem to have continued down the same path. I hope the tradition dies with my generation. It does leave an air of something missing at family gatherings when only one side of the family is present.

My sister and I had not communicated since she got upset over a minor matter when our first son was born. I stubbornly did not try to resolve the matter as we had never got along throughout our childhood. She always had the privileged upbringing. Mum could not see any fault in her daughter. Dad tried to be fair, but in matters concerning my sister, he was over-ruled by Mum. I realised at a young age that life is not always fair.

After my parents moved to Rosebud troubles started to emerge between Mum and Dad which also seemed to be inflamed by my sister. Dad's health started to deteriorate and Mum was convinced by my sister to put Dad into a home. Dad was not happy about this arrangement and he escaped and returned home. Mum promptly had him returned to the home and he was put under closer watch. You can't stop Dad when he has his mind set and some weeks later he escaped again. He was not returned, which surprised me. Some months later I was informed that Mum was divorcing Dad. I doubt this idea originated from her. None-the-less they divorced and Mum moved into a state-funded granny flat at the back of my sister's home, taking her proceeds of the settlement. Dad moved in with my brother.

My brother's wife and Dad did not get along and as a consequence I received a call from my brother. He suggested that Dad move to Queensland to live with me as I had plenty of room on the acreage for a flat for Dad. We arranged for Dad's journey to Queensland. Dad resided for a few months with us until the flat was finished. He then lived there for a short while before needing a lot more care. He was placed in a nursing home. After Dad passed away my brother and I had a disagreement and we ceased communication. In December 2015 Sam told me she had communications from my brother's wife and that they would like to re-establish our relationship. Since then we have emailed each other and our reconciliation is proceeding well. I hope this breaks the Janssen curse.

My sister had married Laurie McAsey and they had a son and a daughter.My brother married Claudia and they had a son Warren, a daughter Angela and a second daughter Stephanie. He worked in the Federal Government Metrology Deptartment for many years. Last I heard they had moved to a country town to open a B&B.

Primary School

I started my school years at the St Albans State School in 1955 and was placed in class 1B. Thanks to Joe Ribarow, I now have the class photo again, my copy had disappeared. I am the little fella with a bloody nose holding the board. I had a few blood noses at school right from the first day. Can't remember why, probably deserved them. Unlike today, we had to walk to school. The walk seemed to take forever and in winter we used to run our fingers along the frost on the fences and arrive at school with blue fingers. We caught frogs in the gutters near the railway crossing. We also caught a Trilobite-like creature, which I had always hoped was a relative of that prehistoric creature, but alas they were only tadpole shrimps. Some kids placed pennies on the rail lines and picked them up after school. There was always some derogatory banter with the Catholic School kids as they passed by, usually good natured, but sometimes it erupted into foul retorts.

Grade 1B, St Albans Primary School; Frans Janssen holding the sign; 1955.

The school had a Monday morning assembly when the anthem was sung, after which we

marched to class to the beat of a drum. I was lucky when I was made a milk monitor. This meant delivering the government-provided milk to each classroom. When we arrived at each class we counted the students and retained any leftover bottles. When the job was complete we delivered the teaching staff ration (plus a few) and then set about quaffing the remainder.

We lost quite a few friends when the new eastern state school opened and then again when the northern one opened. Some friendships were renewed in High School.

There is one teacher whom I remember; I think his name was Mr Cove. He had a love of the Australian pioneering times. He taught us a fair bit of our early history as well as many of the songs from that era.

Occasionally we would skip the last few classes in summer and swim in a water hole just north of the school and sometimes we would go and explore the scoria formations further north. We called them the Volcanoes. In later years a large water tank was erected on the site. One summer we decided to go for a swim in the tank. Not one of our best ideas: the water was cold as ice and we all were getting a cramp very quickly. It was difficult climbing the rope out with numb hands and leg cramps. We all made it out - and very lucky to survive. Never went back.

On the walk from school I often stopped off at David Dusting's home. David had a bedroom of his own which was detached from the house. What a luxury. I was so impressed and envious as I had to share a bedroom.

When I was in grade six I was on the footy team and we had won all our matches on the west side of Melbourne. A newspaper came and took a photo. The newspaper article was headed "The Internationals" and over each team member's head was a label declaring their nationality. The copy I had disappeared recently - bugger. We then had to play against the top team from the east side of Melbourne for the State Championship. When we walked onto the field, to our horror, the entire team was way taller than any of us. We didn't stand a chance, we lost.

I can vividly remember the unmade streets and the green slime gutters that ran along each side. These gutters were full of little red worms that would duck under the slime when disturbed, re-appearing sometime later. We spent a lot of time amusing ourselves by tossing pebbles into the slime and watching the worms - great fun. Most of the time we played in the streets, we would set up a box with painted stumps and play cricket or kick a footy. We made guns out of pieces of timber and played Cowboys and Indians. It was around this time that the main type of refrigeration was based on a freezer box kept cool by an ice block. We loved it when the Ice Man came past in his horse drawn cart because he kept the small chipped off ice and gave it to the kids. Milk was also delivered by horse and cart. The Dairy was on the corner of Main Road East and View Street. Occasionally a few of us kids would sneak into the dairy's horse holding yard and ride the horses around.

Some of the locals were very "creative" in regards to obtaining materials for building their homes. One such person lived opposite us. The father would come home with two bags he carried from work, these bags would contain bricks. These were gathered on his circuitous route from the station. This circuit took him through a number of building sites, the source of his bricks. He built a garage first and moved in, and then he built a house. He also bought more land and was strangely a lot later home each week night. Last I heard, the family owned half a dozen homes and a block of flats in St Albans. What a cheek, but what an entrepreneur.

When I was about eleven, I got a pair of roller skates. On week days I would skate down Erica Street to Main Road East and climb on the Errington Reserve entrance brickwork and wait for Mum to come from work. Mum worked for the Hamptons in their haberdashery store. She knew most of the early business people in St Albans such as the Self and Goddard families and the Stevens family. She knew all the Stevens family by their first name which was helpful later on in my teen years.

During the last years at primary school we used to explore the stone quarry in McKechnie Street. The quarry was no longer mined and had been used as a dump for metal shavings. There were many deep layers terraced to the bottom of the quarry. We would jump from the rim of the quarry and bounce down the layers of shavings to the bottom. We also used to climb the sheer rock face on the opposite side, but we realised the danger and quit that activity after a mate nearly fell from near the top. The things you do when you are young. The quarry at Green Gully was also a favourite spot for exploring. Before they were covered by rubbish, there were a few caves into the hill. It was in these caves that we once found some army equipment such as gas masks, hats and ammo boxes. What a find for a bunch of youngsters, we used them for quite a while in army games.

Once a fortnight Mum would take the tribe to Melbourne. We would go to the Victoria Market at the top of town for fresh fish and cheese. I still remember the cheese hall with high, marble-topped counters. Mum went to one cheese seller and the serving ladies always gave me a slice of cheese to taste. Afterwards we would return through town shopping on the way. We always went to the Coles Cafeteria for lunch. What a massive eating hall that was, or was. I just little and over-awed.

I remember the introduction of television. We would go to a shop in East Esplanade where one of the shops had a TV in the window. It would be on all night. We didn't get a TV for a while. I think the cost of the TV and the associated Viewers Licence you had to buy was a bit costly for us. Dad was very aware of the licence inspectors as he had heard of some nasty stories from some work mates.

High School

I attended the St Albans High School from 1961 to 1965 when I obtained my Leaving Certificate (Year 11). High School was a very enjoyable time for me. I relished the holidays and put up with the school days. I lived for the weekends and holidays when we would run amuck along the Maribyrnong River. We swam at a number of spots from Green Gully down to the "Quarter Mile Bridge" (the Railway Bridge near Sunshine Road). Occasionally we would go to the opposite side of St Albans and play along Kororoit Creek.

We explored the entire Maribyrnong river area and would sneak into the farmer's paddocks to pinch tomatoes for lunch. One lunchtime the farmer nearly caught us. He had been waiting for us with a shotgun containing saltpetre. Luckily we spotted him before he got close and we ran for the river. Nothing stirs the adrenalin like running through a paddock full of Scotch thistle wearing only a pair of swim trunks. He let off one shot but he was far away. I ran like the devil and was mid-air when I saw a black snake curled up just where I was about to land; he had his head curled into the middle. They were the fastest steps ever, one on the snake and then away as fast as possible. It took a while for our heart rate to calm down as we removed thistles from our bodies.

Our favourite swimming spot was at Green Gully where there was a large rock shelf and tall river-side trees. Most summer days we would be there, jumping from the trees and swimming along the river. We had to quit for a few years. One summer I was the first up the tree and jumped into the deep spot. I opened my eyes as I was going down and to my amazement saw tree branches all over the place. I was dropping through them. A tree had fallen into the river and was stuck in the deep hole. The next two summers were spent swimming at the end of Biggs Street.

During one winter we had befriended two recently emigrated Dutch brothers. Their parents were renting a property which had a large shed containing a tin bath. We decided to lash some drums to it and float it down the river. We carried it to the Biggs Street end of the Maribyrnong River and hopped in. The river was running fast and we had a great run until one of the brothers rocked it too much and the drums came free. The tub sank as my brother and I jumped for the bank. One of the brothers got tangled in the ropes and went down with the tub. Luckily he had a knife and cut himself free. We then tossed a coin to see who would dive down to it the next day so we could return the tub to the shed. My brother lost the toss. The next day he swam down to the tub and tied a rope to it. When he got ashore he was blue from the cold. We then hauled it onto the bank and carried it home.

When my brother turned sixteen war games got a bit more interesting after we and a few mates got air rifles. We would separate into two groups and we would shoot at each other from behind the farmers' stone fences. Only below the waist was the rule. This lasted most of that summer until my brother hid behind a bush and then ducked down. Silly thing to do: I spotted a movement and fired low as usual. Heard a yell and then big brother stood up and fired right back and hit me in the chest. My shot had given him a new part in the hair. We quit that game.

One of our favourite pastimes was bike rides north of St Albans beyond Sydenham and also around Melton. We would ride all morning then camp and have a campfire lunch and return home early evenings. Melton Weir provided some interesting camping, especially when the eels came down the spillway. We took great delight catching as many as we could, but only kept the big ones.

One summer my brother and I, and a couple of mates, I think it was Peter Szarko and Radenko Jankovic, decided to go fruit picking past Lilydale. Had a great time playing truancy from the work team and swimming in the farmer's dams. Didn't earn much, just enough for food, booze and a return train fare. The next year the school had an excursion to Lilydale. I knew the local bottle shop where we could get some beer. Misha Dejanovic, Paul Krampera and I escaped from the group and got a bottle of beer each. We then went to the local park for a drink. We didn't have an opener, just knocked the neck off on the park gate and drank carefully. The things you do when you're young and stupid.

I forgot to mention that I also got more interested in girls during High School.

School Days

School days were not my favourite time. I didn't study much during the year, swatted like crazy just before exams. I did alright considering my lack of enthusiasm and attention in class.

I didn't have much of a problem with teachers, only when they tried to catch us smoking behind the shelter sheds. Got a good clip under the ear from Mr Smith one time when I tried to warn the others he was racing towards the shed.

Some teachers do stand out. One, I can't remember his name. He had a dislike for me from day one. He became our maths teacher in

second or third form. On the first day of the year we called out our names. When I said my name he made some comment like "Not another one of you". I didn't know what this was about, nor did my brother. Later that year I was ill for a long time with Tonsillitis and on return asked him for help to catch up in the maths class. He just said "catch up yourself". Lost my basics in maths and as a result didn't continue into the sciences. Another year when the cross country run was on we were dropped off on the other side of the Maribyrnong river. I knew the river well and also the best place to cross over. As a result a few mates and I were way ahead of the pack. We were at the top of the hill before anyone had even found a crossing. We ran to the first cross roads where a teacher was waiting to give directions, and he sent us to the right. We were way down the road and seeing no one at the next crossing, we looked back to see him sending the rest of the runners to the left. What a mongrel act. We didn't stand a chance of winning after that and just slowly wandered back to school.

It was during third form that I started working for the Stevens family business. Initially I worked in the paint shop when it was on Main Road East between Collins and Erica streets. Later I worked in the Mens Wear shop and helped with furniture deliveries. Work place safety was not a concern in those days as the delivery helper had to stand in the back of the utility ensuring the load did not come adrift - cool in summer, freezing in winter.

At the end of fifth form I wasn't sure what I was going to do, High School meant I could not go into the sciences. Wasn't interested in anything else. After a few talks with my parents, Mum suggested I try an apprenticeship or something else at Footscray Tech. I enrolled at Footscray Tech in a Management and Accounting Diploma course.

Footscray Technical College

I was at the Footscray Institute of Technology in 1966 and 1967 studying for a Diploma of Business Data Processing and completed two years of four-year course. I commenced college at the Nicholson Street campus. My attitude was still the same: I lived for the weekends and holidays. I did put in a bit more effort when there were group assignments. However, much time was spent playing pontoon down in the basement storage rooms, or across the road at the pub. My results were still similar, just managing to pass.

Before I got my license we used to go for trips to the beach in my brother's car. Peter Szarko had joined the Navy and whenever he got back in town we would go for drives down to a beach near Frankston. This was a popular spot for us as there was a footy field adjoining the beach. A few times when one of Melbourne's "cool" changes occurred and it rained, we would drive the cars onto the field and do handbrake skids across the field. One time my brother hopped in with Peter and Barry (Peter's Navy mate) and left me and the girls to watch. I wasn't happy with this so I got into my brother's car and skidded across the field, stopping just short of the goal posts. An unhappy brother took the keys off me and never left them in the car again.

When I got my license in 1967, I couldn't afford a car, so for a while I would borrow Dad's new Corolla. This gave me some independence from my brother. I could now go out with a girl and not rely on my brother. A date usually ended with a few hours "parking". We used to go parking in the roads at the end of Biggs Street. I got nabbed by the local constabulary a few times, so was looking for a new parking spot. I finally settled on Main Road East. I would park in front of Coles, and as long as I didn't touch the brake pedal, it was just another parked car. I was never bothered by the police again.

I was still working in the Stevens' shop after school and on Saturdays. This gave me my spending money. I usually worked in the Mens Wear section and helped with deliveries. When I got my license I started doing deliveries. Most of the time it was a Holden utility, but quite often it was in a three-ton Bedford truck. This was a bit of a nightmare because it had to be backed up the dog-leg alley at the rear of the store, which meant someone had to guide the driver. Once when I was guiding the manager he ran over my foot. Afterwards they asked me if I could wiggle my toes; I could so we continued working. I spent the rest of the morning walking around in a blood- filled shoe – so much for OH&S in the sixties.

Saturday night at Peter Szarko's place: Radenko, Frans, Irene, Hans and Helga.

Weekends always involved a party at someone's place. It was usually at Peter Szarko's place as his parents both worked late shifts, so we had the place to ourselves. Attending these parties were the usual crowd: Peter Szarko and his sister Helga, my brother and I, Radenko Jankovic, Corinne Dwyer, Janina

(Jena) Chabowski and Irene Ladun. Occasionally a few others attended, but I can't remember most names as Saturday nights were mostly a blur.

I dated Jena Chabowski for about six months and then we split up. Some three months later we met again at the railway station and the romance was rekindled. We became inseparable after that.

During the second year at FooTech a couple of mates and I had decided to take a break for a year and travel around Australia. This was approved by the parents, so long as we passed all subjects that year. None of us did; we each had a subject needing to be repeated, so the trip was off. To top it off, the College then informed us they were changing the courses and could not start the third year in the Computing stream due to lack of students. This is the course I was going to continue with. It was late November 1967 and after some more discussions with Mum and Dad I decided to look for a job. I was very interested in the Computing subjects and as a result had got high marks, so I decided to look for a job in that field.

Computer Programming

I applied for a Computer Operator job with Dunlop Australia, and after a few interviews, an aptitude and a Psych test I commenced work mid December 1967. A few weeks after I started I got a call from my mates. Their parents had given them the go ahead for the trip. I had to decline.

I decided to transfer to RMIT when Footscray Tech weren't going to continue with the third year of the course due to lack of student numbers. I contacted R.M.I.T regarding continuing with the Diploma course and enrolled in a few night classes.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

In 1968 I started at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in their Diploma of Business Data Processing and was attending part time in the third year of their four-year course. Night classes were hard, finishing work at five and then having to wait a few hours to do an hour or so of learning followed by a commute home. One teacher who had day and night classes decided to amalgamate them into one early morning class. He didn't show up for the first two morning classes and funnily enough nor did any of the day students. Some months later I was getting weary of two greatly varied class times as well as a full time job. The programming teacher had set an assignment to solve a problem in the least number of COBOL instructions. The next week he called for results. Most students had about 10 instructions. The teacher then began to explain his solution of 8 instructions. I kept my hand up. I was already programming and had it in 6 instructions. The teacher finally conceded to allow me to show my solution. I wrote it on the board and he looked at it for a while, and then said it would work. He then continued explaining his solution after erasing mine. I decided that kind of teaching I could do without. Early morning classes, night classes and dodgy teachers, I had enough of tertiary education and my career was progressing fast enough. Decided I would prefer Commercial training. I terminated the course as my career was progressing well enough, I had started programming, and I also got married. I did not want to spend any more years attending night classes, so I quit R.M.I.T. There was at least one consolation for that year, because in mid 1968 I bought my first car, a 1965 HD Holden two-speed automatic.

Commercial Training

Over the next few years I enrolled in a several commercial training courses. These included COBOL programming (1969), National.Computing.Centre (London) Systems Analyst Certificate - Control Data (1972), and Project Management (1973). Since then and up to 2003 I have acquired various development languages for specialised projects.

Career

1967 – 1976: Dunlop Australia. I commenced as a Computer Operator/Data Control Clerk working on the ICT-1004, loading punched cards containing sales invoice batches, batch balancing and then providing Sales and Ledger Reporting for the End of Month. I then progressed to Programmer and eventually Senior Analyst. I was involved in the development and support of the many and varied Applications, from Sales Recording and Analysis, Debtors, Stock Control, Materials Handling and Production Planning. My last major project was the management, design and implementation of the Payroll System for the Factory and Head Office Staff. The Staff Payroll was implemented, followed by a phased implementation of the Factory payroll System. I left because I wanted more varied experience.

1976 – 1981: Nissan Motor Company Australia. I commenced as a Project Leader for the Vehicle Service Department Systems. My duties involved the control of systems development; staff of control (three Programmers) and project evaluation in preparation for future development. The major project I developed was for the replacement of the vehicle warranty register with a Vehicle Fault Analysis and Management Information System. This system was presented to Nissan's Parent company in Japan and was then adopted by them for conversion to an IBM system and further development for worldwide use. I left Nissan to progress my career - wanted to try EDP Management.

1981 – 1982: Hella Australia, Mentone. I was Project Leader and Assistant EDP

Manager. Hella was at the limits of its current configuration and as a result I was initially involved in the purchase of an additional system to service the Sales and Stores Department and have it connected to the Administration unit in a back-to-back configuration. I was in charge of and Analyst and three Programmers. We carried out all the Operational and Development work, even the rotational operation of End of Month processing. I worked on the further design of the Pricing and Cost Revision System and then developed a Sales Forecasting and Planning System which passed production requirements from Motor Manufacturers into the Production Planning System. I left Hella when I had finally convinced my wife to move to Queensland; it had taken seven years to convince her. I had wanted to move after a number of business trips since working for Dunlop.

1982 – 1984: Capricorn Coal Management, Brisbane. I relocated to Brisbane and commenced with Capcoal as an Analyst/2IC to the Manager. I was initially involved in the evaluation of a Purchasing and Stores System package for the mine site. The Manager left two months after I commenced and I together with the development staff put a proposal to Management for a twelve month exercise to introduce strict housekeeping and equipment maintenance procedures throughout the organization. This exercise was necessary as over the years the housekeeping and equipment maintenance activities had gradually declined and job failures, due to their omission, were a regular occurrence. This was especially so at the mine site. Our proposal was accepted by Capcoal management and I was appointed Acting Manager. We completed the task ahead of schedule, after which I completed the package evaluation that I had commenced a year earlier. I had realised that management was not giving me much joy; I preferred development work. I wanted a position that allowed me to control projects, but also participate in the development work. I left when there was a downturn in coal prices and the industry was cutting back on expenditure and staff.

1984 – 1985 Queensland Independent Wholesalers, Rocklea. My duties as Project Leader involved the analysis and design of a new Costing and Pricing System for the organization. This application involved the analysis of the operation of nearly every department. Some of these systems, due to their complexity, were still manual systems. I was the project leader who in conjunction with a contractor and two Analysts analyzed the requirements and developed a data model for the new System. I left just prior to the presentation of the model to management. There was a take-over bid from a Sydney grocery wholesaler and I decided it was time to leave despite management re-assurances that a take-over was not possible. Three months after I left they were taken over and sixty percent of staff was dismissed.

1985 – 2002: Logan City Council; Strategic Development Coordinator (2IC to the Manager). I commenced work with Logan City Council after they placed advertisements to obtain internal staff to replace the ICL Facilities Management team. As Strategic Development Coordinator, I lead a team of three Systems Analysts, two GIS Analysts and two Contractors. They provided support for the packaged systems, maintained and developed layers for the GIS as well as developing add-on facilities to the Packaged Applications.

During my seventeen years at Logan we undertook two projects to convert the Applications onto different platforms. Each time I was the Council Project Manager. The first one took four years to complete, the second only two years. In 1995 Council decided to install a Windows NT based Network. This Network would connect the Administration Centre and the three Depots. The project involved the installation of a network of servers and the installation of 400 PCs. I was the Project Manager for this Roll Out project. It was completed two months ahead of schedule and the team was highly commended by Management for their excellent achievement.

During the last three years I developed a number of databases using Microsoft Access to carry out information analysis and restructuring. I also learned another three languages to enable development of a pilot workflow application. The industry was moving faster and faster and the new Manager wanted young blokes straight from University, not old dinosaurs like me; he was slowly replacing the older staff. I was his main target, so because of this and the strain of coping with my wife's illness, I decided to leave the job and the industry. I left in late December 2002 for a four week rest prior to looking for a new career.

2003 – 2014: Biosecurity Queensland, Oxley, Queensland. I commenced with Biosecurity Queensland as a Field Officer working on the Fire Ant Eradication Project. This was a hell of a departure from my previous work, but I wanted a no-responsibility position in order to allow me to get my affairs into order. I was initially stationed at a Depot in Northgate which was close to our home at Margate. The workforce was divided into an inspection team, a number of treatment teams and a quad bike treatment team. My team volunteered to be the full time inspection team. The Northgate depot was responsible for the north and east side of Brisbane. After some six years the north side of

Brisbane was considered free of Fire Ants and we were redeployed to the main depot at Oxley.

I wanted to handle the chemicals as little as possible so for the next three years I worked on the quad bikes. This was a bit more interesting than inspection or treatment as you had a bit more freedom and the camaraderie amongst the riders was fantastic. I then returned to treatment and inspection after I had a number of close calls whilst riding. I had a star picket shoot up between the bike and my leg - a bit scary, could have lost my manhood. The second incident was an argument with a small incline, ascending the slope the bike hit a small rock, bounced to the side, hit a tree and then stood up on the back wheels and I slid off the back losing some bark. The last near miss was when I was riding along a river in tall grass which was over my head. I stopped when I saw a sudden change in grass density. Just as well, there was a four metre wide by three metre deep gully with a tree lying in it. Had I not stopped I would have been the meat in a tree and bike sandwich. I decided it was time to give up the bikes. I saw my days out doing property inspections west of Brisbane. I then retired. WooHoo.

The Years of Enslavement

In 1968 my brother was in the call up and got a deferment. About this time, when visiting the in-laws, I met Anton Van Ree and we talked about our upcoming call-up. He said that he was told that if you enlist you get your choice of work. He said he was going to enlist and apply to drive trucks. Sometime later I heard he was in the Army driving trucks, but it was in Vietnam. I never heard any more about him. In January 1969 it was my turn. There were four of us in the Dunlop Operations Section in the same call-up. Two of my mates got deferred in early February; two of us didn't get a notice. I was getting worried because word was they would always take at least one male from a family. I decided to delay asking Jena to marry me until I knew if I had to go into the Army. Then in mid March we got our deferment notices.

Jena and I were married in November 1969 and moved into a small flat just off Ballarat Road Sunshine. We lived there for a year and then bought a block of land in Noble Park for $3,500. We had been told by the salesman of plans for a future shopping centre in the estate, but I thought this was just sales talk. I got an offer of a flat in Elsternwick for half rental in return for some caretaker duties. We moved, but seemed to be in financial difficulties, despite the rental savings.

It was in mid 1971 we were travelling to St Albans to visit Jena's parents when we had a head on collision at the corner of Ballarat Road and Geelong Road. The Geelong Road lanes had stopped and I was starting to accelerate past them when a car came speeding out of the third (left) lane and turned straight into us. I had a massive "V" in the front. The weekend before my brother in-law had convinced me of the safety of Seat Belts, and I had installed them that weekend. Jena's seat belt shattered from the impact and she was thrown into the windscreen. She was knocked out and had a broken ankle; I only had a chest bruise. Since then I have sworn the virtues of seat belts.

We moved back to Sunshine for six months but we wanted to build a house at Noble Park and in order to achieve this we decided to move in with my parents for six months and double our savings for that year. We managed to save enough, but when we visited Noble Park in 1972 we were not happy with the development of the neighbourhood. We had started looking for a builder to build our home, and had found a few DMF Star homes we liked. The builder informed us they had some Spec homes at South Springvale.

We saw the house we wanted at Slym Court and purchased it for $17,050. We move in November 1972 and decided to keep the block of land as an investment. A year later we had to refinance the block and we were having trouble keeping up with both loans, so we decided to sell the block. Did that and got $3,500. Six months later they built that shopping centre and the blocks near our block were selling for $13,500. This would have paid out the mortgage – it happens.

While we were paying off the two properties, I decided to earn some extra money to help with the payments. Through a friend in the Police Force I got a job as a security guard at a Hotel somewhere near the Fleming racecourse. This was an easy job, two nights a week sitting in the Lounge and occasionally walking through the bars. At nights end we helped clear the tables and when all was done the barman lined the bar with beers for the workers just prior to flushing the beer lines. I got my brother a job there on the weekends during the day. I had no real trouble during the year or so I worked there, occasionally had to eject a sleeping drunk. Early one Saturday night a bunch of Aussies were having heated discussions with some Italian guys. My partner

and I convinced the Aussies that one of the Italians had gone for re-enforcements and the Aussies left fairly quickly. My brother was not that fortunate. One Saturday a fellow recently released from Pentridge entered the bar with a mate and a few "Ladies". He had been barred from the Pub, so my brother and his partner went to tell them to leave. The fellow's mate was not with him and he was urinating against the Lounge Bar. As they approached, my brother got a tap on the shoulder, silly lad just turned around. He woke up some time later and was told the blokes had made their point and simply left. I quit some six months later.

Like most blokes I started to put on some weight within a few years of settling down. Not happy with the situation I started a morning aerobic exercise program consisting of walking, jogging and running around the nearby school. It was a 4 kilometre circuit.

In July 1974 our first son Clinton Lucas was born. He was a blonde baby with a happy disposition. He was eager to play and always had a ready smile. Sadly eleven months later he passed away, having succumbed to a fever. He was laid to rest in the West Stewart Lawn at Springvale Botanical Cemetery.

Life moved on and in July 1976 our second son Benjamin Marcus was born. He had brown hair and brown eyes. He was always healthy and easily shook off any ailments. He had a big smile every morning. Two years later Samantha April was born. She was healthy until one day she seemed to be choking. After stabilising her we rushed her to hospital. Checks determined that she was prone to febrile fits because her sweat glands were not working. We rejected fit management medicines due to many side effects. We decided to keep a close eye on her especially when sick. This meant cold baths in winter to reduce her temperature and often followed by a visit to hospital.

Both children were suffering from Asthma and our doctor informed us it was affected by ground water in our local area. I had wanted to go to Queensland since the early seventies and this was discussed with the doctor. He agreed it should help.

In late 1982 I found a Queensland mining company wanting an Analyst and was pleasantly surprised when Jena agreed to move. In October we moved to Queensland. Our original plan had two options. First choice was a beachside suburb, if not, then acreage. We couldn't find a suburban seaside suburb with sandy beaches; they all had mangroves and mud flats, so we opted for acreage. We purchased a five acre property in Logan Village. The house had been build a year earlier and the property was a blank canvas. The village itself consisted of a dozen houses, a primary school, a service station/general store and the obligatory old Queensland pub. Counter lunches consisted of a Nuked Pie - real gourmet stuff. The neighbour behind us held the distinction of being the last person allowed to ride her horse into the bar and order a beer.

During the first winter, Sam caught a nasty cold and we went on watch. It was my turn late in the evening and when I checked, she felt cool, uncovering her I found she had started to sweat and the bed was saturated. Two happy parents slept well that night. The asthma was still present. In Melbourne it was eleven months of illness, whereas in Brisbane it was only a few months of potential problems. Usually asthma appeared during a bout of flu or a cold. Family life was good and the kids went to a local small primary school.

I had to quit my morning running due to a back problem that would not go away. Five years of anti-inflammatory drugs and no improvement. Then one time I was home and needed more medication the local doctor's locum sent me to a physiotherapist. She gave me some stretches to do and the back improved immensely. I still do the stretches to this day. I then decided to restart the morning exercise and walked around the block. I walked as fast as I could and had the five kilometres down to 45 minutes. I had a close call one morning. I was walking along the main access road when I almost tripped on my untied lace. I bent over to tie it up. While bent over I heard a whoosh overhead and looked up. A tradie utility had just past by and his ladder was loose and hanging way over the side, where I was walking. He was doing around 100 kmh, so had I not bent down it would have given me a hell of a whack on the head.

We did the usual acreage things: got some sheep, chickens and a cow. Daisy the cow was a dud as she would not get pregnant even after a couple of inseminations by the vet. She was a skittish and playful cow and this frightened the kids as she got bigger. I finally gave her to a friend's neighbour who wanted a grass muncher. In winter we usually got a piglet and raised it till late November and then took it to a butcher where it was chopped, smoked and bagged. Great for Xmas feasts. In the early years we had met one of the older residents of the Village. Occasionally he would arrange a party for the locals. Upon arrival, the kids would be loaded onto a large horse-drawn wagon and go for a ride through the nearby pine forest. When the kids returned he would dig up the Hungi and we

would feast on traditionally cooked pork and vegetables. After the meal the kids were put to bed in the cars and the adults would party on. This tradition was lost after the old fella fell off his horse and had to go into care.

We made a few good friends and one day one asked did I want a foal from his mare that was almost in season - silly question, he knew quite well I did. She was a part Arab and he had a quarter horse stallion. That weekend we helped get the servicing under way. I held the mare in a holding yard while Herb held the stallion in the run-up chute. Jena held the teaser mare (fully in season) next to the chute. She was to back her up to the fence, let the stallion have a quick sniff and the run the mare past the holding yard. She was not quick enough, the in season mare backed up hard against the fence. The stallion was now fully aroused and reared up spraying all over Jena - wrong mare. The next weekend we didn't need the teaser and the mare was serviced.

We got the foal who was a female, we called her Candice. She was a lively horse and loved to gallop towards anyone entering her paddock. She would come to a sliding halt just in front of you - alarmed Jena no end. She was a handful and only I could handle her. When she was old enough we put her in a paddock with a working Palomino - a massive beast who was used out west as a stock horse. She had a male foal called Blaze who was a sandy colour with a white mane and his father's build. He was like his mother, playful. After a few years I swapped him with a farmer for a little grey pony for Sam. Sam tried to get into ponies, but it was not her scene, so we sold it and got no more horses. Ben enjoyed the farm animals but as he grew into his teen years he got a motor bike and enjoyed racing through the bush near home.

Got the place pretty much the way we wanted and settled into enjoying ourselves. I wanted to get the kids into a private school, but they threatened to revolt unless they could go to the High school with their friends. So the kids caught a bus to a nearby High School. They both did well at school. Ben was like me, he spent a lot of time exploring along the Logan River, while Sam did her girlie things, whatever they are. When Ben was fourteen he got a baby carpet snake. He would breed mice and rats and let her hunt them. He kept her until he was about twenty-eight. She was getting old and not eating well so he let her go in a reserve near the river.

At the end of high school Ben got a Mechanics apprenticeship and moved out into the suburbs with a few mates. After a year or so he was tired of living in the real world on a pittance, so he moved back home into the granny flat. What a life, freedom, a small amount of board and Mum supplemented his meals. We started a ritual of Friday night's drinkies at Ben's. Great times, but quite a few Saturday hang-overs. He stayed with us until he finished his apprenticeship. He then moved into a house with his high school mates. In 2007 Ben opened his own mechanical workshop which he still runs to this day. He got married to Bronwyn Giles and they have two daughters, Chelsea and Lacey.

Sam got a job in the nightclub scene and worked behind the bar, but this was only a means of obtaining money while she worked out what career she wanted. She started flatting in inner Brisbane suburbs because the late night drives home were dangerous. She ended up as Bar Manager at the Gig Nightclub. She decided to get into advertising and did a Diploma course at a Brisbane Training Centre. Got a job in a boutique advertising company and worked her way up to management level where she managed the Commercial Property Sales Department. Sam married Jeff Gibson in 2006 and is now a stay-at-home mum for her two daughters, Holly and Madelyn. Jeff is an IT Consultant working in the retail sector.

Sea Change

In late 2001 Jena was tired of the rural life and wanted a change. Earlier that year we happened to get diverted through the Redcliffe Peninsula on our way to see Jena's sister in Noosa. We loved the place, real beaches. We sold up and rented a house on the Peninsula. We looked for a home and finally found one in Margate. It faced south and was just 300 metres from a sandy beach. From 5 acres to 405 sqm, from two weekends of mowing to 20 minutes, now that's downsizing. We still had three months to the end of our rent, so we just planned the renovations we wanted.

At 4 a.m. one morning in January 2002 I found Jena passed out on the bathroom floor. She had suffered a massive brain aneurism. A week in intensive care, then a month or so in a special care ward learning to walk and talk again. After this it was a few months in rehab. She returned home but things would never be the same. Due to the brain injury, her personality had changed and she lived around her routines. I was working and therefore was not a part of her routine. She did not want to go out much, but when we did she would want to go home fairly soon. For the last few years together we only lived in the same home.

In October 2006 things had reached a point where I thought it best to separate, so I moved out and got a flat closer to work. Jena and I agreed that she would stay in the house until such time as I retired. The idea was to let the property value increase until then, thereby maximising our shares.

The Years of Living Dangerously

I settled into the flat and concentrated on work. I had to get used to being a bachelor after so many years of marriage. About a year later when

I had saved enough, I got rid of the family car I was still driving and bought the car I always wanted, a silver MX5. Life just rolled along for a few years, amazing looking back, did I really fritter away a few years?

In 2008 I started going to a Singles Group in a bayside suburb. It had been a suggestion from a workmate. Had a few dates, if you thought teenage girls were hard to understand, believe me it is worse when they are in their fifties. But some you can read like a book. I also started with the online Dating sites. No blind dates anymore, or so I thought. To my dismay there were a lot of ladies that put up old photos, some were unrecognisable when I met them. You fairly quickly learn if a lady is a potential "keeper" or just a one night stand. Met a few potentials, but they all were incompatible in some major way, either stubbornness or mental stability. In mentioning that, there were a lot of ladies that must have had a bad breakup because they were very cold and suspicious, not helpful to a lecherous old man.

In March 2010 I was about to leave a nearby shopping centre when I passed the RACQ shop. Something made me go in and ask about the house insurance. I had had a lot of problems, Jena was supposed to pay the insurance, but at least every other month there were problems. I had told RACQ to contact me regarding any problems. They informed me that the insurance had been cancelled in January; they also had no record of my contact details. After some ranting from me I left and went to my Credit Union and arranged insurance through them.

Three months later, in June 2010 around 5 p.m. I got a call from Ben. He had been watching the news. The news helicopter had hovered over a house on fire. Thought it looked like ours, so he enquired with the police, it was. I raced over to Margate and spoke to the police. A friend had been returning from work and saw smoke at the rear of our house. She told her husband who ran over to see the rear of the house on fire. He managed to drag Jena and her friend out of the house, and then tried to put the fire out, but it had to good a foothold. The house always had good cooling breezes blow through in from the back and out of the front. This carried the flames through the house. The house was gutted. The police forensic investigators decided the fire had been started by a cigarette left burning in an overflowing ashtray on the rear deck. The insurance company hired a special investigator who took three months, but finally decided it was an accidental fire and I was not involved. They decided to rebuild the house.

I spent the next twelve months driving between Annerley and Margate for meetings with the builders. The insurance post fire report had not been very thorough and I had many arguments until I found photos proving pre-fire conditions. The house was stripped down with only the floor, and original cottage VJ board walls remaining. It was totally rebuilt and lined with plaster because the old boards had traces of lead paint. Near the end of construction I was about to start discussions with agents about selling when Sam suggested I buy Jena's half. I decided I would try, beachside life is enjoyable. I applied, and to my amazement they gave a man in his sixties a mortgage. In July 2011, I moved in with the scant furnishings from my one bed roomer. The kids bought Jena a unit in Redcliffe with the proceeds of the settlement.

The next two years were spent trying to set up the house for retirement while paying a mortgage. Utility reduction was a goal, so I got solar hot water and solar power connected and am still to get water tanks. House furnishings were also required. Weekends involved cleaning up and repairing the yard. The yard was a nightmare after a year of neglect during reconstruction. The house is still only scantily furnished, but it’s neat and easy to keep tidy and clean. I have what I need and two spare rooms set up for visitors. Sam and the girls have come to stay for weekends so the girls can spend some time with Pappa at the beach. I now look for shells with granddaughters, as I did with their mom.

The last few years I have been trying to get stuff together for use in retirement. Got two kayaks all kitted out for fishing. I modified a boat trailer to carry the kayaks and gear. After a lot of searching I got a towbar for the MX5. I can now go camping and fishing wherever I want or simply roll a kayak to the end of the street.

Knowledge of Others

I have added this section to shed some light on the lives of other St Albans High students. I hope no one gets offended. All is to the best of my knowledge and memory.

Radenko Jankovic started working for a mate of his father in a lumber yard. He also crewed on his boss's yacht in the Sydney to Hobart race. The last time we met he had returned after six months sailing the tropics with his boss. He said he was moving to North Queensland and wanted to start a charter boat business.

Peter Szarko joined the Navy at 16 to become an Electrician. When he left, he found that the qualification was only recognised by the Navy. He worked as a freelance photographer

for magazines and finally worked at a Wollongong steel mill. The last time we met he was still living with his childhood sweetheart.

Helga Szarko married a Navy diver. We met her again in the nineties (I think) when she remarried and was living on the Gold Coast.

Jim Glouftis married Christine Ladun and moved to Brisbane. He started the first Flea Markets in the state and since then has made a good living from them. He is living the good life in a canal front home on the Gold Coast. They have two sons.

George Glouftis closed his car yard in Melbourne and followed his brother Jim to the Gold Coast. He started a business selling high-end drapery to the Gold Coast mansion owners. He has a son and daughter.

Corinne Dyer booked an overseas trip with Irene Ladun. When the boat was about to sail, Irene reneged. Corinne continued on and traipsed around Europe and Africa for a few years. Last time we caught up in late 1974 she was working as a Cruise Director on one of the large Liners. Lost contact after that.

Irene Ladun cancelled her cruise to Europe and remained in Melbourne to marry her Policeman boyfriend. Last word, about 1995, they were still happily married with a couple of sons.

Wanda Chabowski married George Runcis from Benalla, and they had two wonderful children, one of each. The marriage failed and years later Wanda married Rodney Vaughan. They opened up a chain of Bakers Delight Bakeries from Frankston down the Peninsula. They eventually sold up and are enjoying life in Noosa.

Helen Chabowski married Steven Staley. They have a son and a daughter. Steve started in property finance, and then became a property developer. They have done well and will most likely be retiring to the Gold Coast in the near future.

Carmen Schneidruk married Peter Vaughan. Peter worked in Insurance, Carmen worked with Jena for a while in United Distillers. They had a home in Mulgrave, but later they moved to Queensland and settled somewhere near Caboolture.

Update

In June 2014 I retired. I paid off the mortgage and invested the small sum remaining. It felt great for the first month, enjoyed the absence of morning alarms and ability to do things when I wanted to. After a few months I was getting irritated. I couldn't see why, and then I finally figured it out. After 30 or more years of having a purpose, things that needed to be done, activities needing doing with or for others, I now had no purpose other than my own enjoyment. This was totally alien to me, it seemed selfish. After some reflection I realised that is the way it is now. If I wanted something different, then I would have to change it. I spent a bit of time rewiring my thoughts and have now come to terms with retirement and my situation. I will now find some organisation where I can eventually do some volunteer work, look into some local social groups (Sam's suggestion), and once more get seriously into dating. I will also try Sam's other suggestion and travel some more, but solitary travel may not be as enjoyable.

In 2014 the kids were having some problems with Jena, her health was deteriorating and she was not looking after herself, she was in need of more care. She was getting disoriented at times and occasionally found by neighbours near to home but not sure where she was. The kids had her medically assessed and she was found to be in need of close supervision. On doctor's advice she was admitted to a care facility in Beenleigh. She is visited by the kids weekly and is frequently taken out on picnics and lunches. Her health has improved.

Closing

I hope you enjoyed my life story, because I enjoyed living it.

There were some bad times, but oh so many good times.

Cheers, Frans, 2015.

Frans and colleagues at school reunion 2016

Vera Jurasov: Teacher, Employment Consultant

My parents migrated to Australia in 1949 after the Second World War. Mum was pregnant with me when they travelled here and I was born in April that year. They came from Germany: Mum was German and Dad was Russian. Dad had lived in both the east and west in Russia - initially east of the Urals but later in Minsk where we still have some relatives. He took the opportunity to get out of Russia after the war and eded up in Germany. He met Mum in Germany and they experienced the construction of the Berlin wall and the partition of the country into the eastern and the western zones. Mum was in East Germany, the Russian zone, but was always crossing the border.

Parents

My parents came by boat to Australia and ended up at Bonegilla. My mother was Irmgard Nowak. I think her parents may have originally come from Poland but she was from Magdeburg, which is on the Elbe River west of Berlin; it was bombed very heavily during the Second World War so anyone who survived that would have to consider themselves lucky to be alive. She was born in 1927 and was just a young teenager when the war started.

My father was Wasily Fedor Jurasov. He was born in 1910 and was from Vladivostok, which is on the extreme eastern end of the old Soviet empire. He was well educated and studied at university level in Russia. When they arrived at Bonegilla, Dad was assigned to a poultry farm at Kyneton and Mum was in the house doing all the housework. So yes, I was born and lived the first two years of my life in Australia on a chook farm. Then we moved to St Albans, which was a lot of empty paddocks at the time but an affordable opportunity for the new Australian settlers. Dad found employment in Melbourne with the land surveying section of the Treasury Department in the Treasury buildings. The cartographic section was later part of the Department of Crown Lands and Survey and some of the maps that he compiled are at the State Library. He worked for a long time in topography, creating maps that looked like photographs because he was such a perfectionist. In fact some of the maps he created were based on aerial photographs taken by the RAAF.

Moving to St Albans

After moving from Kyneton in the 1950s I lived in St Albans for a long long time - until I got married, in fact. The old St Albans was just paddocks. To start off my parents bought a bungalow and then my father finished off the rest of the house himself. Mum used to shop at Perretts and the butcher's shop that was on the corner at Main Road West and West Esplanade.

We lived very close to the school in West Esplanade - we were in number 25 which is about a two minutes' walk away.

I started at St Albans Primary in 1955. The Grade 1A teacher might have been Mrs Shuffrey and there was also a Miss Nightingale. I recognise a number of faces from those early class photographs, including Peter Szarko, Stefan Czyz, Michael Martignoles, Joachim Simovic, the girls Margaret, Sophie, Heidi, Karen, Mary Ganger, and Bianca. Mr Enright was the teacher in 1957. Ahmed Ajayoglu used to live just down the road from us and we became friends, so of course I remember him.

Vera Jurasov second from left, class 4B photo, St Albans Primary 1958

Mr Cove was the teacher in Grade 4. He was a fabulous teacher. Every year he used to invite me, Ahmed, and another boy down to his place in Beaumaris for a day. It was fantastic. We would go by train to Beaumaris and he would pick us up from the station and we'd spend a nice day with his family and their two little children. Then he moved to Lower Sandy Bay in Tasmania. When I got married I called him and saw him, but I haven't seen him since. He'd be well into his eighties if he's still with us. I think he was about 29 when he started teaching.

Ahmed Ajayoglu and I became pretty good friends because we were neighbours not far from the school. His family came to St Albans from Somers migrant camp in about 1951. They were on the corner just opposite the school and we were a bit further south near the playground at Circus West. Ahmed's father was also a highly educated Russian, so perhaps it was this combination of Russian and academic heritage that formed a connection. Their place was

opposite the school on the corner of Ruth Street and West Esplanade. They had a tiny shed facing Ruth Street that they made into a tuck shop where you could buy a pie for a shilling. They also had chooks running around their back yard and if you didn't have your own chooks you could always buy one of theirs for that special occasion. That little tuck shop was later rebuilt as a proper corner shop and grocery store.

Ahmed was a clever guy and we were pretty close academically. We would have contests. In those days the teachers would sit the knowledgeable students down the back of the class. Ahmed was always there at the back and I was either next to him or just in front of him. This went on all the time through primary school. He was also a good athlete but his academic interests prevailed and he became a statistician. His sister, Bella, was also very clever and was in the first intake of students to St Albans High School when it started in 1956. She became a doctor and had an obstetrics clinic in Footscray for many years.

I became involved in the marching and skipping and in grade 6 the school had marching lessons for the girls. I remember all that. I used to look after the school fish tank during holiday times. We used to bring the tank down to the house and I'd look after the pet fish. I remember the Hatjiandreous and the day that their house burnt down as we could see the smoke just across the road from the school.

St Albans High School

I started at the high school in 1961 when Mr Wilkinson was Principal. He was a tall, gaunt-looking man, who sometimes had a ready smile. Naturally, I would walk to the high school, but I would also come home for lunch every day. My brother Alex would stay at school for his lunch. He was born at Sunshine hospital so he was a true western suburbs boy from the beginning.

I did German, geography, history, and mathematics with Mr Pavlov. He reminded me of my dad because of his Russian background. I remember Mr Ziemelis as the German teacher and and Mr Henry teaching biology. I remember Mrs Sturasteps who also taught German. Everyone was a bit afraid of Mr Smith the science teacher. I loved literature and Mrs Gliddon was well versed in Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales. She was also very good at poetry. You either liked literature or didn't go into her classes. She was very quietly spoken and really focussed on passing on this knowledge. She was the head mistress and had a little office on the corridor as we went down the steps past the office. I liked her as a teacher. Veronica was also in that group.

High school was a good time for establishing friendships and a close classmate of mine was Nina Skorobogati. Other friendships included Barbara Teichman and Veronica Debevc, and Helen Smith and Lynette Cox. Nina ended up doing nursing. I believe she and her sister are living somewhere near Mulgrave; I think there were also of Russian background. We mostly drifted apart after high school. That's why reunions are great because it's about seeing everyone together again and where they've all gone, what pathways they've taken. There is a connection because we had a very good group and everybody pulled together. It was nice.

I didn't do too much socialising after school because I had strict parents who expected me to come home after classes. I went to one school social with Ahmed. Mum was also pretty strict as a parent but she finally allowed me to go to the social "under duress" but she came to school to collect me.

University and Teacher Training

After high school I obtained a teaching bursary and started at Monash university, but I hated it and didn't finish. Travelling from St Albans to Clayton was a real problem. My dad was very strict and controlling. He said: "You are going to university and that's it." He was even choosing my subjects: "You've got to do psychology, anthropology, and Russian." Well, I've got a music background and did subjects like German because I didn't want to do the others. One day I said to him that I was leaving the university and went off to Melbourne Teachers College that was attached to Melbourne University. I was there in 1970 and started teaching in 1972 at Boronia Heights. When my father finally accepted that I was doing teacher training he insisted that I not teach the little children but at university or least at the high school level. I told him I wanted to teach in the primary schools and that's what I did.

I taught with the Education Department for about 20 years mainly at Boronia Heights and Kilsyth but I also did emergency teaching at various schools.

Marriage and Family

I met my husband-to-be at a German club in Richmond. I would go past the club and eventually joined as a way of keeping in contact with the German side of my heritage and that's where I met Evert. We married, settled into Kilsyth and built a home at Upwey. We lived there for 29 years but we are now separated. We have two boys: Kurt, named after my uncle in Germany, and Gareth. Kurt works for Dan Murphys and Gareth builds simulators for racing cars.

Visiting Russia

When I was at Monash in the late 'sixties I wanted to join a group trip into Russia, so I put in a visa application. There was a whole group of us from the university planning to go because we were studying Russian. We were all excited to go and I did all my paperwork and received my visa but then the government cancelled it. I was the only one blocked from going even though there were other people in the group who had Russian parents - everyone else went except me. Although my father made inquiries he did not find out why this happened especially as he had never been in the army. Even the Russian department at Monash couldn't discover why my visa was cancelled and no reason given. But I did go to Russia later on and I've been to Germany several times since, so whatever the glitch was on that first occasion was rectified.

I went to Russia in the 'nineties to visit my relatives in Minsk, and by then there was no problem in getting a visa. I went to Germany and left my two young boys with Mum and flew over in Aeroflot. I arrived at the airport in Minsk and realised I didn't know anyone from a bar of soap and could hardly speak any Russian as I spoke mainly English and German. However, I did have a Russian-English dictionary. I saw two guys waiting and I thought one of them must be my cousin. He was there waiting for me with a bunch of flowers wrapped in newspaper. I'll never forget it. We hopped into his little car and sped along until the cops picked him up for speeding. I spent about ten days with the family in one of the Minsk suburbs. It was a nice time but very intensive and mentally draining because you're trying to communicate with hands and feet and everything. He could speak a little bit of German, which was a godsend. It was like walking into a third-world country. They didn't have a broom in the flat so everyone was twigging rather than sweeping as they would use twig brooms. They were still using horses and carts in that suburb. People lined up for bread and the shoe shop might have one pair of shoes on display. They still used an abacus in the shop. It was stepping back a long time but it was the only time I went. Because I was a teacher my cousin took me to one of the local schools and introduced me to the class.

At present I don't know where some of my old relations are and my written Russian does not exist. I tried to keep in contact with the relatives but all my grandparents are gone and documents are hard to find because a lot of records were lost during the war.

New Career

After finishing my teaching career I went into employment consultancy. I did that for eight years with IPA. At first I was in town and then move to Wantirna where they changed their name to PBS. That was 8 years overall. I became national ?? But stressed to the max. You achieve your KPIs but they keep raising the bar so it's very stressful. So I resigned. The stress of working as a consultant, the stress of selling the house, and the stress of building interstate did effect me. I was a moody sort of person back then and I still have some of that capacity - I'm a worrywart. I like to be organised, to know where I'm going, I like to achieve. I always set myself goals and I stress if I don't achieve them to my satisfaction.

I left the employment consultancy to reduce work stress. One of the clients I'd worked with was running the Baton Rouge in Rowville, so I joined him there working in the front office. I loved every minute of that work. After a year he wanted to retire so I decided it was time to go to Queensland. I went there in 2012.

Parents in Retirement

My dad was a very controlling person. You could say he was clever but silly. He tried to teach us Russian every night but we spoke mostly German at home. He wanted his children to fulfill his dreams, which was probably a normal hope for refugees, but it doesn't help the children who want to realise their own dreams and ambitions. He was always studying while he was working and even after he retired he took up Italian at Melbourne University. He always complained about some stomach problems but they didn't know what it was. As a child he had contracted typhoid, which may have effected his general health, and he also had been diagnosed with some hydatid disease. When he became more seriously ill he was told he had a liver disease but he didn't trust the doctors here so he went overseas to get his health attended to. He was told here that he had to have a colostomy bag but he didn't want that so he went to Italy looking for a cure but they couldn't help him either. I was teaching at the time and tried to contact the doctors he was consulting overseas but they do not give you much information. When he came back he looked about 90. He died in Prahran in 1975 at the age of 65.

Mum is now aged 87 and she is still walking and her health is reasonable. I took her with me to Cairns and she loves it up there.

Moving to Queensland

I moved to Queensland a couple of years ago. I'd been holidaying in Port Douglas every year for some time and found the place really beautiful. I loved the lifestyle and I loved Port Douglas. "P.D." is what we call it. I thought it was a place I'd like to retire to and it happened earlier that I thought would be possible. Mum fitted into the lifestyle quite easily because I always took her with me on holidays to P.D. so she was familiar with it.

I arranged everything from Victoria and it's wonderful what you can do these days through the internet and the telephone. I bought the land

in Bentley Park through one company. I chose the site because it's in a court and secluded. Then I found a builder with some great house designs and modified one of their plans to what I wanted. I saw their plans online and then modified the design. The builders were wonderful. It all went beautifully and I would fly up for the latest progress inspection and so on.

My mum moved into my Rowville unit a month before we left for Queensland. She'd been growing frailer and one day collapsed upstairs. That's when my heart started working harder than normal as it was a rush to get her to a doctor at the hospital. I also went to the doctor and complained that my heart was racing. He prescribed some medication, which did help. After I moved to Cairns I stopped taking the tablets which was not wise as you're not supposed to stop suddenly. I saw this wonderful doctor in Cairns who calmed me down and stabilised the blood pressure. It took four months but I'm now off the anxiety tablets. I've slowed down a lot in Queensland and now the work that I do is in the garden.

I love the heat in Queensland. My work at present is in the garden, which started off as a bare block and is now a tropical delight. I've been working on the garden for the last 18 months: planned it, shaped it, dug holes and planted lots of things. Everything grows very fast and I mow the grass twice a week just to keep up. There is lovely patio out the back to enjoy the mountain views and visitors such as Willy Wag Tails and lots of other birds as well as the gorgeous Ulysses butterflies keep me entertained. All this in your own back yard. I go for regular walks with friends along The Esplanade at Cairns. I've been snorkeling, scuba diving, kayaking and trekking up the Daintree.

I left my two boys in Victoria. They were so supportive and encouraged me to go, so I achieved a passion I'd been pursuing for some time. I now have a little grandchild in Melbourne, a 4 month old grandson called Jaxon, so I'm doing the doting nana thing. Life is good.

Vera Breeuwsma nee Jurasov, 2014

Peter Karol: Pilot, Businessman

My name is Peter Karol and I came to St Albans with my parents in 1950. I completed my primary school education at the Sacred Heart School in St Albans, and then attended St Albans High School from 1961 to 1966. I was christened Vova Karol and was known by that name during my childhood. Confirmed in Catholic School as Peter, I started using the name Peter Karol after I left high school; it was easier than Vova at that time.

My father was of Russian background. I had always wanted to take Dad for a trip back to his old home town, so when he was turning 75 I promised that I would take him for a holiday to celebrate his birthday. We eventually did go back to the town where he was born, near Volgograd, which is deep within the Ukrainian interior. Here I met the uncles, aunts and cousins that I knew existed but had never met before, and it enabled me to find out more about Dad's early history.

Father's Background

My father was a grandson of Cossacks from along the river Don, which is central to the region, but he didn't want to fight in the Second World War and left everything to escape to the west. He defected from Russia and headed to Czechoslovakia. He was only 17 years old at the time, so it must have taken a lot of determination and courage to even contemplate such action. He didn't have any specific plan or resources, he just took the chance that opportunities would become available. His identification papers would not have allowed him entry into Czechoslovakia through the proper channels but a bit a luck and good advice enabled him to get in through the back door.

He met a Czech women who worked as a border guard and they had a romantic love affair. She sympathised with his wish to get out of Russia and helped him do it.

The border there was comprised of a river. She knew where the American border guards were located, and she knew that the river currents would carry any floating objects close to the American checkpoint. But, she warned him, if he couldn't convince the guards of his genuineness, they would either send him back or imprison him. He took the risks, survived the river currents, and, as expected, was detained by the border guards. After questioning him closely the Americans finally issued him with temporary identification papers, and that was the start of a process that enabled him to establish a new life in the west.

Emigrating from Europe
He made his way to Germany where he met and married my mother-to-be, born in Osek, Yugoslavia. Mum was working as an orderly in a hospital and her mother was working there as a nurse. Mum's parents also wanted to get out of Germany, so Mum and Dad came to an agreement with her parents: one couple would go to Belgium, the other to Australia, to see which would be the better country in which to settle.

Mum and Dad went to Belgium, where I was born in 1948. My father was working in the coal mines to support the family. In the meantime, my grandparents came to Australia. The doctor for whom my grandmother was working was well respected and he helped her apply for immigration; I think they may have been sponsored through one of the church organisations and would have come in 1947 or 1948. After a year or so the family decided that Australia provided the better opportunities, so my parents applied to migrate here. It took about 18 months for this to eventuate.

Arriving in Australia
My parents and I arrived in Melbourne in June 1950 and at first we stayed in some arranged accommodation in Richmond. My grandmother was working at the MacRobertsons chocolate factory at the time, and my mother also got a job there. My father got a job as a process worker in one of the tyre factories. Eventually my parents built their house in Sylvester Crescent, St Albans, near the railway line.

Attending Sacred Heart Primary
I started school in 1954, which was the year that the Catholic Church was built in Winifred Street, and it had several classrooms along the south side. I started in bubs grade, and then progressed through all the years as the school gradually extended the number of classrooms. The school was very close to home, so it was easy for me to go to Mass, like any other good Catholic child. I remember that at one stage you could get red stars as a reward for going to Mass, and Henry Goralski and I were having our own little competition as to who could collect the most stars. For me it was a case of getting up every morning and going around the corner to the church before school.

The church and the school were built in stages and relied a lot on the volunteer labour of the parishioners. My father was one of the volunteers helping with the building. Fred Barnard was the builder who did a lot of work for the church and the school. I had Miss Barnard as one of my teachers, and Sister Leonard is another one I remember.

Starting High School
I started high school in 1961, but after about 6 months the family moved to Newport because my mother had started running a shop out there. Business was not very good, so we ended up coming back to St Albans and I re-enrolled at the high school in 1962, joining Form 2B. This was the year I teamed up with Johnny Belko.

Form 2B, 1962. Vova is in back row centre.

Johnny Belko struck me as being a bit of an outcast as no one would sit with him in the 2B classroom, so I decided to join him. He was only a short guy, but he was tough - you didn't want to mess with Johnny Belko. One of the things I liked about him was that he wasn't afraid of standing up for himself whatever his size. One day I was getting picked on by one of the school toughs and when Belko saw what was happening he came to my protection. He got stuck into this guy and beat the crap out of him. No one ever touched me at school after that. I think the message must have got out: if you mess with Peter Karol, you mess with Johnny Belko. I thought we made a good brains and brawn team, because I would help him with some of the school work.

Johnny left school after 1963 and trained as a butcher. He had the butcher shop in Main Road East near the Tin Shed for a while, and I think he ended up running three butcher shops at one stage. I don't know what he's doing at present, but I wish him well, because was a good-hearted person for all his apparent rough manner.

Getting my Pilot Licence
1964 was an interesting year for me. I was in Form 4 and that's when I started training to get my pilots licence, which was not connected in any way with the school. One of my mother's friends would often spend some time on the weekend at our place, and she would ask me a few questions about what I was doing. One day she asked what I was thinking of as a career and I had to admit I hadn't thought about it much. She said "Why don't you become an airline

pilot?" I said I couldn't do it because I wasn't clever enough. She told me off for being so negative and said I could become a prime minister or a pilot if I really wanted to, that the opportunity was there. I thought about that, and decided 'why not?'

Over the next two years I studied to become a pilot. I did all the ground training and flight lessons until, in early 1966 when I was in Form 6, I obtained my pilots licence. I always thought it was a bit funny that I was licenced to fly in the sky before I was licenced to drive on the ground.

Getting my Driver Licence

I applied for my driver licence as soon as I was able, and obtained it on my 18th birthday. My parents were quite supportive of me in getting both licences. I had some money saved up prior to turning 18 and my Grandparents helped me purchase my 'pride and joy' car prior to when I was 18. I think I was the first person in the form to get their licence and certainly the first to get ready access to a car.

I can recall the day I went for my licence, 40 years ago, when I had a loan of Henry's prefect jacket, so that I could suck up to the Copper that was going to test drive me for my license.

What else could he do but "pass me" after I slipped him a $5 note. Decimal Currency was "in" by Feb '66 - in that year I trumped 18.

The ole Copper thought for a split second and handed me back the $5 note and said - "fill that pissy Falcon of yours with a tank FULL and ask your mates where they want to go." (We all said Sale Sale Sale after hearing the MYER ad for what was happening in Melbourne Town.) The ole Copper went on to say "and with the change from the $5 you tried to bribe me with - make sure you have a tank FULL to take you back home."

How times have changed - $5 gets you out of the driveway today - and that's it.

What a great weekend it was. August 2nd, 1966. It was great fun taking a bunch of mates out for a drive. We only looked the "devil" in the eye once when I forgot to turn left and went straight into a "cow's home" (some people call it a paddock) so that we could experience pushing a car back onto the highway and thanking GOD that the fence was barb wire with no poles in front.

Sometimes we'd go for a drive during lunchtime, but you had to be careful to get back on time. One day we got back late and Mr Matthews, the senior master, had us all lined up wanting an explanation. He knew I was the driver.

"Whose car do you have?" he demanded.

"Which one?" was all I could think of saying.

He was a bit taken aback by my response, but calmed down when he realised I was fully licenced and there was nothing illegal about our use of a car. Matthews was an okay fellow, but he did tell us not to be late for any classes in future.

With my own car, a 1963 Ford Falcon, we went on some great trips, but from then on we made sure it was after school hours.

D Dusting, H Goralski, G Snooks, L Chatterton, V Karol, P Barbopoulos, J Attard

Flying Experiences

After high school I was keen on a career as an airline pilot. I had to accumulate around 500 hours first and did some commercial charter work after getting my Commercial Pilots Licence at the age of 19. I was also teaching ground subjects to potential Commercial Pilots since I already had my Senior Commercial Pilot subjects.

One day I took some high school friends (Joe Attard, Henry Goralski and Peter Barbopoulos) to the country near Hay in NSW for a shooting experience – we were going for some wild pigs. On the way back, we stopped at Mangalore Airport, got an all clear weather repot, and were allowed to fly home to Moorabbin. Bad weather developed fairly quickly after take off as a cold front moved across the Great Dividing Range trapping us in a huge valley near Healesville. A storm front engulfed us as we flew over the Range and because of the low clouds I couldn't see the way out of the valley and we were too low to be picked up by any radar, so it was a dilemma what to do. I had plenty of fuel, so I could have kept circling for 3

hours, but there was no indication that the cloud cover would lift and light was fading quickly.

Meanwhile, Joe, Henry, and Peter are all trying to give me advice and suggestions at the same time about what to do, because they could see we were in a spot of bother. Anyway, I said the them, "Guys, can you stop talking, because I need to make a decision and you're distracting me." Suddenly there was silence, just like that.

I decided we had to land before last light, and found one paddock that was a possible landing strip. There wasn't much space and the terrain was rough, but it was the only possibility. All my training had kicked in because I was quite calm and my one concern was to get my passengers landed safely. They thought the field was too short to try a landing and said so, but I knew I was the only one with the training and experience to make that judgement and asked them to be quiet again. Which they did immediately. Anyway, I landed in that little rough field and the plane was only slightly damaged. But the best thing was that we all got out without any injuries. I must admit I was relieved that none of my friends were hurt.

Unfortunately, my fiancée thought that zipping around the world at 32,000 feet was risky and it made her very nervous and worried, so I gave up that idea as my main career and decided to try my hand at computer programming instead.

Computer Programming

Computer technology at the time was based around mainframes; there were no personal computers or off-the-shelf software as we now have. Computer programming for the commercial sector was just emerging as a new field at the time, and I wanted to try it. I phoned up a computer consultant (Norm Longmuir) and asked for some professional advice (I paid for his time and advice), about the possibility of making it in the Computer Industry. He gave me some aptitude tests and said if I passed his course he would give me a job. I got the job and started as a programmer cutting code in assembler. The Computer Industry was kind to me. I traveled around the world two times and lived in USA for six months.

Norm taught me a lot about sales and marketing. He was selling the payroll and commercial packages and since we were always developing applications, he would agree to anything to get a sale. His standard answer was "That's being developed right now and should be ready next week." He hated missing a sale and was always confident in adapting the software to meet specific requirements. Then we would come back to the office and all the programmers would have to work on modifying the program. It might be provided a bit late, but it was provided.

Long hours was the working order of the day. Liz and I had married in 1971 and our son, Justin (born 1975), was nearly 12 months old when we were living in East Keilor, which was half way between the respective grandparents. One evening I came home and was looking at my son and I realised that I didn't know very much about him. I decided there and then that I had to change.

Noosa

That's when we decided to sell up and head for Noosa, Queensland. The plan was to buy a business there and get the benefit of a lovely climate as well as being your own boss. We bought a squash court and ran that successfully for 18 months. We built a house there but in the end, Liz got homesick and we came back to Melbourne. I got a job placing computer staff, then got back into the computer industry in sales, moved around a bit and in 1987 bought another squash court in Mill Park. Once we got that business up and going, I got restless and thought I would try real estate.

Recent Business

I joined Nicholas Lauder in the late '80s. Within two years I was running the Greensborough Branch and had done quite well. Then I made the foolish choice to join Ian Reid who fired me after 18 months because, as he said, I was a silent partner in one of the largest squash courts in Victoria (Diamond Valley). The fact that I witnessed my ‘branch manager’ with the receptionist did not help my case even though my branch manager gave me permission to go ahead as a silent partner in the squash courts.

I've always enjoyed the challenge of being involved with different business ventures. At present my business partner and I run a very large Newsagency and Tattslotto Centre, which is ranked within the top 8% of Lotto outlets in Australia.

Peter Karol, 2005.

Rosemary Keegan: Student 1960 - 1963

Rosemary Keegan attended St Albans High School from 1960 to 1963. 1963 at St Albans High was unique because it was the first year that Matriculation classes were taught at the school. The high school had started in 1956 but in previous years there had never been the required number of students staying on to justify holding final-year classes. Rosemary and her classmates were thus the first Form Sixers who graduated from the school at that level. The matric year comprised of 27 students. There were 8 girls and 9 boys in the humanities stream and 10 boys in the science stream.

A Biography

My father was Irish, from Waterford; my mother English, from London. They met in London during the Blitz in World War 11 and married in October of 1944. My mother served as a WAAF during the war (Womens Auxillary Air Force) and worked as a personal assistant to an Air Commodore at the Air Ministry. My father was on 'reserved occupation' at BTH in London working on leading-edge wiring. They came to Australia in early 1949 on assisted passage, migrants known wryly as 'ten-pound Poms'. I was three years old and, at that time, their only child.

At first they lived in Sydney, but there was a General Strike at the time, and my father could not find work. Eventually he found a position in Tasmania, at the Goliath Cement Works in Railton. The position came with a house and so we lived for a few years in Railton before moving to Devonport.

I began school at Our Lady of Lourdes in Devonport. My sister Angela was born in Devonport in 1952. As a child, I recall being envious of my sister because she had been born in Australia - and when we later came to live in St. Albans, my sister was one of the very few children at school who had actually been born in this country. My sister, on the other hand, says she always envied me for being born in London - and at Queen Charlotte's hospital - which she says has had something to do with 'The Beatles'.

My mother was homesick for England so we spent a year there in the mid fifties living in London with my grandmother in St. John's Wood and returned to Australia to live in Melbourne. My father, being employed as a bookkeeper at Olympic Tyre in Footscray, looked for a place to live somewhere closer to work. He heard that there was a new development in the western area, a new suburb St. Albans, and some of his work colleagues had already gone to live there. At the time we considered the landscape there as a kind of 'outback'.

Then, St. Albans was the last railway station on the line, the streets were unmade and my sister remembers that we used to wear our gum boots to walk to the station whenever we were going into the city, as the roads were usually so muddy. We used to leave our boots under one of the seats at the station - and put them back on again when we got home. They were always there.

We lived in one of those small 'skillion' houses on a block of land at No. 8 Erica Avenue - our family of four, mother, father, and we two sisters Angela and Rosemary. Everyone in our street lived in a similar dwelling. The idea was, that when the 'house' and land had been paid off, you would then build onto the original structure and complete a proper house. Which is what we did - as did most of those around us. Our finished house was a typical 1950's weatherboard and it was painted blue. My father had a sign made with the name of the house "Roseanne" after his daughters.

The house had not long been finished when my father, aged 49, died suddenly from a heart attack on the morning of August 11th 1958 - my mother widowed at the age of 35. She then met Stepan Mihalik whose own wife had died in Yugoslavia and who had come to Australia with his then four year old daughter. I seem to remember that Steve (as we called him) had been living in our same street. In any case, they were married by Father Reis at the Sacred Heart Church in St. Albans where my father, as a good Irish Catholic had been a member of the Holy Name Society. Many years later, my little sister, Angela, was married in the same church - by Fr. Reis - to Tommy West, whose family - British father, Greek mother - also lived in St. Albans.

For the eight years that I lived in St. Albans - all the time at 8 Erica Avenue - I spent four years - years 5, 6, 7, and 8, at the local Sacred Heart parish school and four years at St. Albans High School in forms 3,4, 5, and 6.

I am enormously grateful for the way I was taught at St. Albans High. The nuns, at primary school, had told us, had led us to believe, that the 'secular' teachers wouldn't care for us the way they, the nuns, would. I found exactly the opposite. In the four years at the high school I was taught by wonderful teachers. The most influential teacher in all of my education was Mr. George Strauss - later Dr. Strauss after he completed a Ph. D. at Melbourne University in French literature - on the role of the devil in the works of Andre Gide. Mr. Strauss had been a young Jewish boy sent to England to escape the barbarity that was occurring in Germany during the 1930s and 40s. He gave us a love of learning and a belief in personal integrity.

He was particularly drawn to a group of students among us who, he said admiringly, not

only read European works of literature but read them in their original languages. These were the children of European parents who had been displaced by the war and who, more often than not, were professional people; chemists, engineers, educators, in their own pre-war countries. I was not one of those multilingual Europeans - but, I was part of the group who wanted the sort of education which was being offered to us. In the end, even though I was not gifted in languages as my European friends were, Mr Strauss had me reading the works of Andre Gide in French.

Form 5A with Mr Strauss

In 1963, we were the very first matriculation class St Albans High had ever had, and as in some education circles we were considered to be dis-advantaged, the Education Department sent us a group of extraordinary teachers who guided us through that year - including Mrs. Alison Gliddon, Mr. Alcorn, and others whose names I've forgotten - as well as our long time, much loved Mr. (Doc) Walsh who had taught us history all through the lower forms and who, as well as Mr. Alcorn, taught the matric history subjects. During that final year Mr. Walsh - who loved theatre - directed us in a play, "The Winslow Boy" by Terence Rattigan. I had the part of Kate, the boy's older sister, and I remember the excitement of going to a Melbourne theatre company's costume department to select out costumes.

M Bowkun, V Mahorin, G Castagna, R Kiss, Mr Conroy, Mrs Gliddon, S Gunew, R Keegan; 1963.

Most of our matric class went on to university. I think most went to Melbourne. I do remember that there were several "Exhibitions" gained by students in our class. It was also the era of "Commonwealth Scholar-ships" brought in by Robert Menzies and there were quite a few scholarships awarded to that year also.

I went to Melbourne Uni in 1964 with a number of my friends from that class. Rosemary Kiss and Sneja Gunew went to live in residence at University Women's College (as it was called then) and I went to live in residence at St. Mary's Hall which was affiliated with Newman College and housed in a great old mansion on The Avenue in Parkville, (now Treacey House) - a few years before the new St. Mary's residence was built on land next door to Newman.

It was as a result of receiving a Commonwealth Scholarship that I was able to attend university and live in residence and I am grateful for this always.

But it was Mr. Strauss who was instrumental in my enrolling in the four year degree in the School of English Language and Literature. (We called it "Pure English" in those days) He had been so right about the way I'd learned so far that I took his advice in this too. He had, for instance, introduced us to the novels of Patrick White. I still have a first edition copy of Riders in the Chariot. I think Patrick White, in this novel, was one of the first novelists to write so seriously about the Holocaust - as he did with the character of Himmelfarb. Throughout the years I lived in Canada I read and re-read the works of Patrick White and the wonderful biography by David Marr - as a treasured resource when I was away from Australia.

After I'd finished my degree I went overseas with Australian Volunteers Abroad - and taught in Malacca at both Yok Bin High School - where I taught English - and at Malacca High School where I taught the upper and lower sixth form the English Literature course to those preparing for the Cambridge 'A' Level exams.

When I returned to Australia I met Terry Blake and we married in December of 1969, Melbourne at the Newman College Chapel. Terry was completing his Ph.D in Science at Melbourne and his first job was at ANU where he taught for a few years before coming back as a lecturer at Melbourne Uni. Whilst on sabbatical leave from Melbourne Uni my husband was offered a position at the University of Toronto. We moved to Canada as what was known as "Landed Immigrants" in 1978 after having spent that year before in Alberta. We lived in Canada for 28 years - a couple of them in Calgary, the rest in Toronto. When the Australian government allowed people to have dual citizenship we took out Canadian citizenship. This was after having lived there for about 24 years. We had not wanted to lose our Australian citizenship and so we waited until that was permitted. I can't relay the pride - and relief - I felt when we attended the ceremony. I also feel gratitude to the Canadian government for its openness to those who come there to live. And as corny as that may sound, I am proud to be Canadian. (I guess I will never try to stand for parliament here.)

During our matric year, our school took part in a school's debating programme. We ended up in the finals of that contest. The finals were filmed on TV on a Saturday afternoon. Our team consisted of three girls - Rosemary Kiss, Sneja Gunew and myself (known then as Terri Keegan). The topic was "There should be equal pay for equal work" - or something similar. We were pitted against a catholic boys school. They had to agree with the proposition. We had to oppose. I think we lost the finals, but I think it was popular opinion that we ought to have won. When the compere came into our dressing rooms before the telecast to gather some information on us, he said in a weary voice, "Oh, and I suppose you all want to become high school teachers." We surprised him. Sneja said she intended to become a literary critic, Rosemary Kiss, a pharmacologist, and I replied 'I am going to be a theologian'. In the televised introductions the compere said, when he was introducing me, "And she says she's going to become a theologian."

Father Conrad Reiss, next morning, after mass said to me, "What the bloody hell is a woman theologian!" In contrast, Mr Alcorn, at school the next day said, with great kindness, "I heard something rather lovely on television yesterday." He had taken me so seriously I had not the heart to explain that I had just been joking. He lent me books by Kant and Kierkegaard - which I read, struggling, hardly understanding a thing. Strangely, though, whilst we lived in Canada, I completed two post graduate degrees from the University of Toronto's School of Theology. Mr. Alcorn, I thank you for your interest - and prescience.

Ten years ago we returned to Australia when my husband retired from the University of Toronto. We now live in Geelong. My sister lives in Clifton Springs. Unfortunately our three children are scattered - a daughter and grand-daughters in New Zealand, one son in Toronto still, and another son in Sydney. We get together each year in Lorne in the weeks before Christmas.

Just before we returned at the end of 2007, my collection Wintering was published in Canada by Ekstasis Editions. Some of the poems recall those years in St. Albans, in the western suburbs.

Rosemary Blake nee Keegan

Dr. Rosemary Kiss: Historian, Professor, Grants Commissioner, Arts Patron, Expert Commentator On Local Government

Rosemary Esther Kiss is of Hungarian background and her family settled in St Albans during the 1950s. Rosemary's connection with Fitzroy also occurred at this time as she would join her family in attending the services of the Hungarian Reformed Church, which were held in the Napier Street Presbyterian Church.

St Albans High School

Rosemary started at St Albans High School in 1958 in Form 1A. She became the form librarian and was also on the magazine committee as form representative. She continued on the magazine committee for several years. She was made a prefect in 1961 and then appointed head prefect in 1963.

Rosemarie receiving award as School Captain, 1963.

Melbourne University

Rosemary's career aspiration at high school was to become a teacher - her classmates obviously recognised loftier academic potential, as it was said of her that “She rises to sublime heights in the realm of philosophy and it is often a job to bring her back to the more mundane levels of matriculation.” They were right. She enrolled in the Arts faculty at Melbourne University been a resident at the University Women's College and studied at the university during the late '60s and obtained awards for her examination results in 1967 and 1968 and graduated with honors.

In 1974 she was appointed as a lecturer in history at Melbourne University. She would have been familiar with the institution as she had studied there from the late '60s. She qualified for her Master of Arts in 1982. Her major tertiary qualifications thus included B.A.(Hons), M.A., and Grad.Dip. Data Collection & Analysis. Later, she held the position of Research Fellow in the Department of Political Science at Melbourne.

Kiss established herself in Gore Street Fitzroy in 1972, where she became involved in local history and local government concerns. In

1976 she married Melbourne academic Leslie Lloyd Robson. Robson was an Australian historian who was born in 1931 at Ulverstone, Tasmania. He was also wrote poetry. In the late 1950s he undertook postgraduate study at the University of London and then in 1963 he was appointed lecturer in history at the University of Melbourne, where he taught mainly Australian and Imperial history. Robson was promoted to senior lecturer in 1966 and to Reader in 1977 and retired in 1988 but remained an active associate of the History department. He died of cancer in August 1990 at Fitzroy and was buried in the old cemetery at Penguin, Tasmania. In 1994 Rosemary Kiss donated $25,000 to Melbourne University to establish a research award - the Lloyd Robson Memorial Award - in memory of her late husband. The purpose of the award was to assist postgraduate students of Australian history to undertake research interstate.

Fitzroy Council

Kiss became actively interested in planning and conservation issues and served on the Fitzroy Council from 1978 to 1981. She was a foundation member of the Cutten History Committee of the Fitzroy History Society and wrote an MA thesis on the growth of suburb in the 1800s. In 1980, Melbourne University published her thesis as a book: Neither Power Nor Glory: A Study of the Origin and Development of the Suburb of Fitzroy, Melbourne, in the Nineteenth Century.

She has many other references and chapters in various publications, including:

- "Transport Policy" in Trials in Power, Cain, Kirner and Victoria, 1982-1992; Considine & Costar, 1992.
- "The Business of Politics" in Fitzroy, Melbourne's First Suburb, 1989.
- Are We Kidding About Local Autonomy? Local Government in Australia; European Consortium for Political Resettlement Joint Session of Workshops, Grenoble 2001.

From 1980 to 1989 she worked as a public servant where her responsibilities centred on housing issues and developing programs to involve tenants of public housing in management and decision-making. During 1985 her position was Coordinator of the Rental Housing Co-operative Unit, Ministry of Housing.

In February 1989 she was appointed as a member of the Victoria Grants Commission, which consisted of a Chairman and two part-time members appointed by the Governor in Council for a period of not more than five years. The principal role of the Commission was to determine the allocation of general revenue grants provided by the Commonwealth to the State for local governments and to see that the funds are allocated to support the needs and disabilities of the more disadvantaged municipalities.

During the 'nineties Dr Kiss was coordinating the political science internship program at Melbourne University which enabled under-graduates to gain experience in state, local and non-government organisations - she led a dedicated group who supported the develop-ment of the Victorian Parliamentary Internship Program as academic supervisors and mentors. This program has continued operating ever since and has catered for over one thousand internees. Several of the interns in fact progressed much higher in their positions by becoming Members of Parliament - Daniel Andrews was one of these, starting with the program in 1994, being elected to State Parliament in 2002 and becoming Premier in 2014.

In 2002 Kiss was with Melbourne University's Centre for Public Policy.

Retirement

In 1995 Rosemary married a retired school teacher, Conrad O'Donohue. Among other interests they became art collectors and patrons through donating items to various galleries. For example, the exhibition at the Geelong Gallery in 2011 featured a number of prints that were referred to as the "O'Donohue & Kiss gift." This was a selection of European and Australian drawings and prints from the seventeenth century to contemporary times, gifted to the gallery by "collectors Conrad O'Donohue and Rosemarie Kiss."

Rosemary has now retired to Rippleside in Greater Geelong. She continues to be active in her local community through networks such as Women in Local Democracy (WILD). She is a firm believer in democratic participation, as exemplified in comments about political power:

> *Having power is a core component of effective political citizenship. Citizens can only truly participate when they believe, and actually have, transformative influence or power. It is only in these conditions that citizenship is widely seen as a worthwhile pursuit. (December 2004).*

Dr. Rosemary Kiss, 2014.

Bernard Kokot: Despatch Clerk, Fisherman, Freelance Writer

I have many fond memories of St Albans. Just as background, the Kokots arrived in Australia on the "Hellenic Prince" landing in Fremantle, W.A., 1950 as Polish emigrants, including me at the age of four with mum and dad. I still remember some of the trip, especially when we docked in the Suez Canal, It would have been Cairo, and the ship's crew sending down a rope with baskets of cigarettes to Arabs in wooden boats below in exchange for Arabian carpets. There was often great rage by the ship's Greek crew when the cigarettes were taken but no carpets sent up in return. I can still hear the sailors swearing today. It was a coincidence in 2001 when I moved from St Albans to Howlong, NSW, and met a German lady neighbour who arrived to Australia on the same ship ... and the same date.

The ship finished the journey at Melbourne where we docked in Melbourne on Anzac Day 1950. Due to the festivities, and being a public holiday, we could not disembark. There were the marches, speeches and everybody later to the pub so hence we sat on board till the next day.

From Melbourne we went to Mildura Camp for a short while, then we lived at the Bonegilla barracks near Wodonga for about 10 months. At four years of age I recall women swatting large Hunstmen spiders from the ceilings inside the barracks with straw brooms. A close eye was kept on us kids as black snakes were common. Polish migrants were the last to complain since the food and freedom was much better than the country they left after the war. The Aussie heat however was a certain change, having left Germany in a snowy winter just a few months prior. Then in 1951 the old man bought a block, now 1 Scott Avenue, St Albans.

Friends and Neighbours

I went to St. Albans State School in West Esplanade up to grade 4, then for Grade 5 and 6 I went to Sacred Heart so as to make my first communion, then onto St. Albans High School until 1964. As all schoolboys do, we all had our own little "circle" at St. Albans High. The vagabonds I remember well, to name a few Polskis and Ukrainians were : Anthony Laskowski, Michael Kadniak, Tony Wyka, Jerry Sawczuk, Eddie Lacinski, Vladimir Bobko, Michael Chabiera, Eugene (Froggy) Frolczenko, the Bezborradoff brothers Eugene and Vlad, Joe and Stan Maziarz, Alex Korinfski, Gus Hyrgatus, Jesse Rutkowski, Joe Zdroewski, Ian Niedzwicki, Richard Zabieglik, Richard Link, Stan Zawadski, Andy Lubicz, Wishi Dawidowicz, Marian Rozczak, Charlie Chircop, Johnnie Mazurak, Klaus Becker ... the list goes on! I have some early photos of those days. I am lucky now that even at 69 years of age my memory is still undulled and sharp as a tack. Since "The History of St Albans" has lately come to revival, it has been my intent and priority to put to paper much memorabilia. Old memories are so important.

Mrs Olga Kokot, Bonegilla, 1950.

I still have a remnant population in my circle of friends from the 1950's St Albans genre ... Polski's ... Germans ... Ukrainians et al. I will even throw in the magnificent contributions the Maltese made in what St Albans once was, but now demographically modified.

I am still in contact with old friends who are ageing disgracefully ... such as Ish Niedzwecki ... now living in Deniliquin some many years. I speak with Ish three to four times a week. Ish was the person who revived this "Old Polski's St Albans nostalgia / memories" stuff and the continuing camaraderie between myself and Ish ... and now sadly last 12 months deceased Zbignew ("Joe" aka "Zed") Zdroiewski ... early boys of Cornhill and Hook streets, St Albans.

I still maintain a bi-annual communiqué with Jan Dworecki. My Polski "paparazzi" mates in St Albans keep me weekly informed on the local scene. I am a freelance writer, mostly fishing-related techno-science / heavy research stuff ... and now just closing off some heavily academic papers. I have read the current history book and there is a lot that can be added, so I

give you "The History of St. Albans from a Kid's Perspective 1950s and 1960s."

The book brought back some fond memories of our early days as St Albans kids, particularly from the early 1950s. In conjunction with a few past colleagues of that era we thought our recollections would add a little to the overall story. Most of us are now just either side of 70, a remnant few have retained St Albans as their home, some have moved to nearby locales and several interstate. The concept for this anthology was promulgated by Joseph Ribarow and much input and nostalgia contributed by the late Joe (Zed) Zdroewski and still quite animate Ian Niedzweiki now living in Deniliquin NSW. Myself, Bernie Kokot, lives in Howlong NSW, having moved here from St Albans in 2001.

In general our parents were all migrants of around the 1950s of Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and German descent, followed by Latvians, Lithuanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians and Czecho-slovakians. Later arrivals circa the 1960s were the Maltese. It's not important to be chronologically precise, nor specific to use names, but it was the kids of that early era that bring back those fond recollections. I write this story "off the top of my head" to the best time frame I can recall. Having just turned four years of age, I landed in Australia at Fremantle on Anzac Day 1950, having sailed from Germany on the "Hellenic Prince". There was a short spell in a camp at Mildura, then onto Bonegilla. We lived in Mentone for some 12 months during which time my father worked as a cook at a prominent Racing Stable earning money to build our one-room fibro bungalow in Scott Avenue, St Albans, in 1951.

Father's Work

A little bit of history to go with that of my old man goes like this: still learning fluency in English was no barrier to early European men seeking immediate work and many found this at Victoria Railways. The Poles, Germans, Ukrainian and similar Slavs were readily accepted in the early 1950s as hard workers and fast learners. Their objective was to earn money to promptly start building a house. I still have somewhere my father's book of wages paid in is first job as a car (train) cleaner at Dynon Road Railway Yards, Melbourne. A week's pay was then 5 pounds five shillings. He also did some work at the Victorian Railways workshops at Newport and that job was extra "overtime" hours on that same evening having finished work at Dynon Road. During annual leave with the railways my father worked for that three weeks on the canning line at Smorgon's Meats factory in Somerville Rd. Yarraville. (The Smorgons then were good employers of European migrants.) In order to purchase a suit for my Confirmation, my father in-between did some labouring work at the ICI factory in Deer Park. The nature of the work was carting away blue-stone rock in wheel barrows as part of the ICI factory extensions.

My mother and several of the 1950's emigrant ladies from St Albans found work at Bradford Cotton Mills in Footscray. This mill at the time was a major producer of rayon string used in the manufacture of tarpaulins for the Australian Army.

During that time as a kid I never went without. I was always well fed and dressed and it was from our parents we learned that if you ever bought anything it was with cash payment. In the instance of promissory payment on "next pay day" any credit purchases, always building materials from Steven's Hardware in St Albans, was duly paid on time and to the letter. My parents never borrowed any money from friends although a few Polskis did "diddle" my father on occasions taking advantage of his generosity.

Those days were indeed ones in which we as kids, were brought up to respect society and the law, where a foot-in-the-bum from the local copper was sufficient to instill discipline. I think the greatest "crime" I committed as a juvenile was to knick some apricots over another's fence, and at one time when about 10 years old, I stole 3 cigarettes from my old man's packet and got sprung. But what kid didn't do that anyway?

Early St Albans

St Albans was just vast flat paddocks. Given a tall ladder, one could have a 360 degree unobstructed view, the only landmark being the old St Albans Railway Station and the then ICI Munitions factory on Ballarat Road, Albion. Early recollections are of me being sent to the Railway Station with two buckets to bring back water to our block, the frequent explosions at the ICI factory and ammo storage bunkers in the paddock across from our bungalow, and after heavy rain, the quagmire of our Scott Avenue and Andrea Street corner. I lose count of how many times the nightsoil (dunny) truck got bogged and I can still picture the postmen, John Dougherty and later Mr. Batty, battling through the mud to far-spread mail boxes.

That was about the time the first house was being built behind our block and another half way up Glendenning Street. Dad's Polish friend Janek and a Mr Nosal were from Pennell Avenue. The late Mr. Eugene Czyzewski lived at 43 Pennell Avenue and they were my mum and dad's closest Polish friends - Mr C. was connected with the Polish community in Victoria. Another good Polish friend was a Mr. Mielewski who was a St. Albans Polish community

figurehead in the fifties. He used to organise a lot of bus outings and socials for us migrant families to (say) Daylesford and apple picking at Bacchus Marsh. I think he was also a committee member of the Polonia Soccer Club. (He was also the Santa Claus I mentioned in earlier memoirs.)

I recall our bungalow had a kitchen sink (concrete wash trough) and bench inside behind the window. The rest was open plan but comfortable, with a lino floor, the walls Masonite lined. We had a small wood stove that used briquettes. Lighting was by kerosene lantern and cooking on a small single burner "Primus". The toilet was the iconic Thunderbox near the backyard chook shed. The pigeon coop provided some memorable meals!

There's a gap in memory of any mates I had until I started at the State School in West Esplanade in 1952 where some camaraderie developed with a friend who helped carry in the cases of small bottles of milk, many that had their tin-foil tops pierced by magpies. I made other friends when I was sent to Sacred Heart Catholic School at Grade 4 when I also met others in the First St Albans Scouts: the Scoutmaster then as I recall, was Mr. Micallef. We had to bring sixpence that often was naughtily spent on lollies at the old Corner Milk Bar in Amy Street opposite the then Butcher's shop, later Des Barnard's pet produce store.

I can recall going to that Post Office with Mum in the mid fifties to send aid parcels (mostly of soft goods like Australian wool jumpers and Onkaparinga blankets) to her less-privileged sister then still under Communist regime in Ukraine. There are also my early memories of both Mum and Dad sending similar, plus then Australian Pounds, either in those parcels or paper money enveloped in newspaper sheets in a letter. This was done with parents going into Melbourne by train and lodging that dispatch through the Polish forwarding company "Contal & Co". There were many dismays when my parents received a letter from their overseas kin advising that the woollen goods were received, albeit parcels opened and resealed, but the money in the envelope was missing. There was obviously a lot of thievery at the Russian post office end.

Outings

I met other friends when our parents would go to the early versions of a "dinner dance" in the Glengala Hall. Adult associations developed as did children's at those venues. Mr Zuk was one of our first Polish friends to have a car about 1952. Visits were always a great joy to us kids but more so such friends provided transport for parents to socialise at evening dances at Glengala Hall and other venues outside the then limited hours when trains ran. I remember a picnic at Lake Wendoree, Ballarat, in 1953. Escaping from the St Albans' summer heat we piled in Aussie neighbour's Chevrolet truck for a day's outing to Wendoree, Daylesford, Bostock or Moorabool Reservoirs. At Christmas on the return journey home the back of the truck was overhung with a few Christmas pine trees.

Mr and Mrs Sroka were good friends of my mum and dad and arrived in St Albans near the same date as we did. The Srokas built their house sort of around the middle of Glendenning Street, a few doors down from the Blahuts. Their son, Joe Sroka, was my age and we were good friends as I was with John Blahut. I think Joe Sroka went to Sunshine Tech and I recall him still being around circa 1990s working in the plumbing and roofing trade.

The Koliba and Hercelinsky parents were good friends with my parents as were Mr and Mrs Babicz. Other familiar names are Kopoczinski and Mr Giraffa. I remember Stan Koliba as well. Richard Link also lived in Kate Street. Stan Zawadski similarly thereabouts. Richard Link and I were friends in St Albans again from 1987 when I returned after 12 years living in Sydney. I was told by Jan Dworecki (still at Main Road West) last year that Richard Link passed away. I also remember my parents being friendly with Mr. Linkiewicz, as distinct to Link I presume. Mr. Jablonski also lived 4 doors up from us in Scott Avenue.

In Cornhill Street and nearby, other Polish names are Gus Hrygatus, Michael Kadniak, Anthony Laskowski (dec) and the Rutkowski family, the boys then Jesse and Roman, two girls also but I only remember Anna. Mitko Neskov was a later arrival to Scott Avenue. In Pennell Avenue were the Wroblewski (son Robert), Anna and Maria and brother Dobrowolski , and then cousin the Ukrainian Tony Bayliss. The Belacic boys also across the road. The Sikorskis were very close friends of my parents, as was their son Frank as a mate of mine. Mr. Jim Shanley at 30 Scott Avenue was my Confirmation sponsor. Up north behind Biggs Street where there is an industrial complex, lived the Belkos who were family friends. Johnny Belko became a butcher and for a while had a shop in Main Road East near Ungers. Also in Scott Avenue were the Svars, also being friends on ours. Vladys Svars got killed in his Austin A70 at the bottom of Green Gully.

Growing Up

At about six years of age all the kids developed their "independence" with their first bicycle. At that age of six we were entrusted to virtually go anywhere on our own. My first big solo ride was to attend Tony Landrigan's sixth birthday party at Landrigan's farm, then on Taylors Road just before Gourlays Road. We all slept in the hayshed which was a real buzz for a youngster. Around that time my father would also dink me on the bicycle to the old Taylor's

Lake (dam). We would fish for eels till midnight.
One of the first priorities our migrant parents had was to buy a radio. The ABC then ran a program on how to speak English and most of us kids of that genre might remember that after that program finished we were allowed at 6 p.m. to listen to the Air Adventures of Biggles, then followed by Hop Harrigan. If you were good, you were allowed to listen to D24 with that haunting voice of Roland Strong. After that the older folks would listen to Radio Moscow or German Radio on short wave.

At age eight I recall going to Victoria Market with my father bringing home a small butchered pig. The head was used for making 'galareta' (pork in aspic). Hocks were smoked as was belly pork made into Kaiser Fleisch bacon. My father constructed a rudimentary outdoor BBQ cum smoker in the back yard veggie patch. The butchered pig would also provide us with Pork lard. The Victoria Market gave you variety whereas the local butchers primarily sold mutton with beef an expensive rarity set aside for 'special' Aussie customers.

Our back yard had a veggie patch with fruit trees and garden growing prolific from mum's gardening skills gained as a young woman working on a collective farm in her home country, the Ukraine. We had a variety of fresh veggies, berries and a grapevine. Invasive rabbits were more than welcome as an addition to the cooking pot! Sunday was always home grown chooks.

With a few more houses popping up in the nearby streets we cemented more friendships although it was customary then that each locale had its own little “gang”. There was never any rivalry as the term gang may suggest. Well, not until the prelude to bonfire night on “Guy Fawkes” when there were many raids on each other's bonfire stacks to pinch old car tyres. Our mob had the biggest ever bonfire with 64 car tyres that left an ember residue, where three days later we were still baking potatoes in the ashes. Despite no aluminium foil in those days the spuds tasted a treat.

Adventures

The building of red gum paling fences around houses offered plenty of scrap timber from which to build billy-carts. Axles and pram wheels were sourced from the then St Albans tip, now the Soccer Ground in McKechnie Street opposite the St Albans Hotel. I have no idea how many nails we pilfered from our father’s wooden tool box to hold the round axles onto to our chariots. Wire staples were also pilfered to use in shanghais, not to mention the lengths of lead-solder rod ... and the old man’s valuable nuts and bolts and woodscrews ... as the projectiles for our “penny-bunger” cracker guns made from a metal bicycle pump tube. That tip (bluestone quarry initially) was a testing ground for many of these contraptions and a playground for some dare-devilry, jumping from the layers of “springs” or swarf (metal shavings) ex the H.V. McKay works in Sunshine.

I also recall the “Volcanoes”. The scoria quarry, now the foundation of Kruger’s Truck Works at the entrance to the St Albans Uni Campus ... the other on Taylors Road upon which Melbourne Waters storage tanks stand. Not only were these also billy-cart testing grounds, but when the excavations filled with water, we would boat on them in half 44 gallon drums. Few of us in those days knew how to swim! No youngster in those days would forget the “Biggs Street Swimming Hole” or the “Green Gully Swimming Hole”. The Biggs Street one claimed many a cyclist when brakes ran out on the descent. Worse were the buckled wheels and flat tyres in pushing it back uphill to home in 40 degree heat with an inch of hot lemonade left in the old R.M. Mosely wooden screw-bung stopper. Eric Alan’s Bicycle Shop, Alfrieda Street, however provided undying bike parts replacement and repairs.

The Green Gully swim-hole also provided similar challenges. Being the new tip then, we would stop off to shoot rats and snakes with all sorts of home made “Zip Guns”. Afterwards and ever fatigued after many hours swimming, to get up the Green Gully hill it was just a matter of waiting for a slow moving truck, and, on one’s bicycle, hang onto the back of the truck for a tow to the top. We never seemed to come to any peril be it from this activity, or diving from the top-most branches of the gum tree at the swimming hole. This usually followed a belly full of green, unripe apricots that were nicked in the orchard alongside the river, often avoiding a few shots in the backside from 12-gauge shotgun salt pellets!

On quieter week days we would go fishing in the Maribyrnong River. Jumping a few years ahead to about age 12 and first year at St Alban’s High School, a schoolmate and I would wag afternoon sports times to go fishing here and several times got sprung by our teacher. The punishment was being barred from going on any school excursions. Both my friend and I were then quite artistic and created mature written “sick-notes” forging our parents' signatures. It has always been a mystery how that teacher knew where we went, or who was dobbing us in. He eventually gave up when we changed our fishing venue to Jackson’s Creek at the Organ Pipes that provided better cover. The Arundel Bridge, Keilor, was also a popular swimming hole.

Other “pastimes" were spent by some at McTaggart's Riding School at the top end of Main Road West in the paddocks near the piggery. That was my first and only ride on a

horse having been bucked off and very unceremoniously bruised.

We also often got bruised nicking a loaf of fresh bread and falling from the back footstep of the horse and cart baker that did the rounds of St Albans. I recall the bakery then being in Main Road West, this side of the present Railway Station. The bakery was a very welcome arrival as one could only buy bread (pre-order) at Wardle's Store. There was still a little animosity in those mid-fifties towards us “non-Aussies" even though we were Naturalised. I recall my mother buying biscuits for me but she was told she could only have the broken ones as the intact ones were only for “special customers”.

One photo I wish I would have taken in the 1950s was the corner Milk Bar ... its frontage to Main Road West and its side Amy Street - the short street along which Des Barnard's Produce shop is sited opposite. I still have a vivid image of that shop in my mind and have wanted for a while to get out my colour pencils and sketch the old green weatherboard house and the massive cyprus pine on the western edge of what is now Amy street. It was "The Shop" for those living on the Main Road West side. The shop had several owners over its duration: Maltese and perhaps Lybian or Turkish at another time. In reality it was good competition to Wardle's General store.

One highlight I remember was a stormy December day, where leaving the milk bar, I crossed the the dirt and narrow Main Road West, stepping oven a shallow scoria stone fence as a short cut via vacant blocks. I would have been 6 years or so at that time. All of a sudden a massive lightning bolt struck some few feet in front of me, bowling me over backwards. The only damage was the two bottles of Lemonade (with those wooden screw cap, thick glass bottles I was toting) broke, and I severely gashed my hand.

Progress

In those similar years when many us moved from our fibro bungalows into recently built houses. Our first block was at 1 Scott and diagonally opposite us was a second home at 3 Pennell Avenue where our first neighbours lived - they were Chas and Jean Roberston and son Ron. They moved from Essendon into their self-built cottage. A great Aussie friend Chas Robertson (owner/builder) helped many migrants. They were dinki-di Aussies and advanced my parents' English-speaking skills in addition to what Mum and Dad were picking up listening to an ABC Radio program that on various nights had Polish and German language programs with English explanations. They were building brick foundations for their house in 1951 and I was sitting in the wheelbarrow watching them. This was the day Mr Robertson told me to barrack for the Essendon Bombers. Directly behind me in the photo on the horizon is the present Station Road / Ballarat Road, Deer Park intersection. The paddocks behind are now the fully built up Cairnlea. Furlong Road runs east-west in the distant horizon behind us.

I recall the old grey Commer Van doing the street rounds selling flagons of wine, specifically white varietals Hock and Sauterne. My father, as nearly all migrant kids' dads did, bought a flagon of each on the Saturday, most of which with help of a few neighbours was consumed by Saturday night. I, as did other kids, was then sent to the chemist’s shop about 10 a.m. on the Sunday morning to ask for (buy) a bottle of “medicinal wine”. It was sold without question even though I found out many years later it was the potent “Invalid Brandy”.

They were the days when monthly the “Bottle-O” would call to collect empties in his wooden cases. We kids mostly got the proceeds. That was our pocket money later used to go to the pictures at the Sunshine Theatre or the train fare and entry to the Middle Footscray Baths. From those mid 1950s I have my father’s Victorian Railway payslips that show his weekly wage at £5/5/- (five pounds five shillings or $10.50). It’s a credit to our parents of those days that we never went hungry, always well dressed and my receiving two shillings every dad’s payday as pocket money plus the two big bars of Cadbury’s chocolate. As an aside, our then block of land in Scott Avenue cost 90 pounds ($180). My father and a Ukrainian friend built our house and most migrants in similar situations are indebted to the trustworthiness of the Stevens Timber yard in providing materials on credit, assured the cost thereof would religiously be met every “pay week”.

TV and Olympics

We are now circa 1956 when TV arrived, the Melbourne Olympic Games, parents meeting Australian friends in St Albans that had a car and opportunity for picnics etc to regions beyond St Albans.

The arrival of television in 1956 opened up more opportunities for kids from both sides of the railway line to meet. I recall when Unger’s Milk Bar put a TV on the rear shelf of their shop and at around 4 p.m. after school many kids would sit cross-legged on the shop floor watching the Mickey Mouse Show. (The early St Albans migrants were proud to accept the opportunity that Australia offered and wanted to be seen to adapt to "Australian Standards" and it wasn't long before I had my own "Mickey Mouse" tie.) Mr Unger would give us kids a free ice-cream as we sat cross-legged on the shop floor watching "The Mickey Mouse Show" on one of the first TVs in St Albans. The other TV on public view was in the window of the then Anderson’s Furniture Store in Main Road West. It was a drawcard to many passersby and prompted my parents to buy their first TV set, in

particular to watch the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. My parents went to the opening ceremony attended by Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip in November and I was very proud of being one of the very few, if not the only kid in St Albans, to have a small pennant souvenir flag of the event proudly furling on the handlebars of my bicycle thereafter.

Pertinent to the arrival of television I vividly recall the anxiety my parents experienced when word got around on the grapevine (no home phones then) that inspectors from the Broadcasting Commission were doing unannounced nocturnal rounds checking whether TV set owners had a current "TV Licence". To migrants that had not long escaped the ravages and trauma of World War II, these inspectors were reminiscent of the German Gestapo or the Communist KGB. Even though most TV sets then had indoor antennas, the surveillance equipment used for the checks could identify TV signal reception. Our house always had a current licence, but the knock on the door from an inspector was rarely a welcome visit.

If to digress a little, but on the same point of sentimentalism, I still have indelible memories of my parents being emotionally moved when in the stillness of those St Albans nights came the haunting, reminiscent wail from a distant steam locomotive's deep-throated "whistle". Without even reference to the photo in my parents old album of Mum, Dad and myself, then three and a half years of age standing petrified on a steam loco leaving Germany, those sounds to me were also chilling. I am sure that the sound of the then occasional 1950's police car siren as it passed through St Albans on whatever midnight errand had similar effect on recent European migrants.

Bicycle Escapades

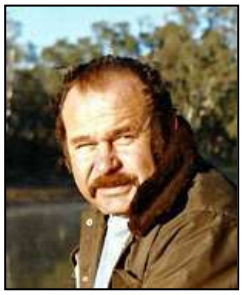
Back to that lighter note of bicycles: bike repairs would have taken up a lot of a young kid's time. This was not an era of "toss it away and get a new one." It's anyone's guess how often the cotter pin on the pedals slipped as one was at speed, riding "hand-and-heels" jockey style, only to land heavily on the cross-bar on that part of the anatomy between the big toes. If your bicycle was a "fixed wheeler", chances are every pair of long pants you owned were perforated at the cuffs. Often it required extreme dexterity to lay the bike down and contort with one hand to reverse the back wheel and extract the cuffs from the greasy chain.

Better-off kids had bikes with the 3-speed rear wheel hub. Few parents then would not forget the tub of butter (returned to the block-ice, Coolgardie chiller) with black grease in the butter. This was always after doing a "bearing job". The ball bearings then were individual and not the encased type. The butter was used to adhere the ball bearing into the bearing shell during reassembly. Bike chains I recall were always a constant repair and it took quite some skill to ride a bike with a chain made in sections of various, un-matching links. A "breakdown" some 6 miles from home was a disaster. Punctured tyres were no concern, remedied by packing the flat tyre with straw grass, ripping ones shirt into strips as binding to hold the tyre onto the rim.

Mum's wooden clothes pegs were ever in short supply and father's deck of cards always lacked the full deck. Both cards and pegs were used for the whirring "motor noise" as the card rattled on the spokes of the back wheel. (Plastic sheet then barely existed.) Our inventiveness went even further by replacing the standard bull-horn handle bars with a car steering wheel. This meant you could dink two mates: One on the cross-bar, the other sitting on the steering wheel. For some reason girls' bikes were more refined and rarely had problems, but a boy would never ride a girl's bicycle for fear of being called a sissy.

Liszukiewicz's Kite

Around this time my mother, as did several other neighbour ladies, went to work at Bradford Cotton Mills in Footscray. I recall one time Mum bringing home a remnant roll of strong, rayon string. It must have been some 2 miles long: just the thing for use on kites, which were then a popular pastime, with little fear of overhead entanglement in open paddocks. (The high tension electrical pylons were only in the early stage of erection then.)



One time, with the assistance of then across-the-road teenage neighbour Henry Liszukiewicz, we constructed a monster (6 feet high) brown paper kite. It managed to get so high on that roll of string that it encroached upon the landing path of aeroplanes on the final descent to Essendon Airport. We lost visual sight of our kite (it broke away) until an Aviation Authority person located us at our Scott Avenue "launch site" and advised us of altitude limitations for kids' kites. That is a true story. Henry came to Australia at age 13 and couldn't speak English, but he ended up studying medicine at Melbourne University and came back to St Albans to practice with Dr Balabin. We used to go camping and fishing. He was only 57 when he died of cancer on 1 February 1994. The Dawidowicz's are kin to Dr. Henry and each year we acknowledge this in tribute in a Memorial fishing trip of which the Doc was always involved with us in the 1960s to early '90s. I was a very close friend. I also remember that Dr Henry had been

a close friend of Bill Betson, who was then Senior Detective Constable at St Albans and Sunshine. What a wealth of history there is if only some of the aforementioned were still able to tell.

Flaunting the Law

Is anybody prepared to admit that they put pennies on the rail tracks behind where the St. Albans Hotel is now? What about jumping off the end of the platform at that end because you had no ticket? Or changing carriages at Albion to be a jump ahead of the Ticket Inspector with his ticket punch to notch out the day and time on those heavy cardboard tickets? It was never with any miss-intent, but many of us kids were chastised for placing pennies to be flattened by trains on railway tracks, scaling the supporting structure of "The Quarter Mile Bridge", trespassing around the ICI munitions bunkers, shooting rabbits with slug guns, the usual paper plugging of the coin-return in those public phones ... and the icy-pole stick trick to make free calls. However, we caused no vandalism and graffiti was unknown. (Aerosol spray cans and felt pen markers were not yet invented.) European parents' discipline was strong in those days and the authority of Police revered and respected.

The greatest extent to which we flaunted the law was finding and reusing train tickets that had not been "Expiry" punched, stealing fence-overhanging fruit and huge sunflowers and sneaking under the canvas into Ashton Circus or Carnival that were regular events in St Albans. A couple of vagabond mates I still know confess to stealing empty lemonade bottles from the back of their local Milk Bar, only to get sprung 15 minutes later trying to cash them in at the same shop for the deposit ... probably to buy a then packet of 10 cigarettes!

Sacred Heart School

At around age of 12 we met many new friends when attending Sunday Mass at Sacred Heart. Church to us boys was more of a social gathering rather than religious enlightenment. We were always fearful of the yearly home visit by the Parish Priest lest there be a discreet report to parents of our juvenescent "activities". I always received a clean slate as my father made a good donation to the visiting reverend, both monetary and "in kind", over a few glasses of wine during the padre's visit.

My memories of Sacred Heart Catholic School (1957 and 1958) are scant apart from the time my mate Mick and I brought live snakes to school for presentation as "nature study". The nuns immediately made us put the snakes into the incinerator. Mick and I however were praised for our enthusiasm and despite other mis-demeanours were never reprimanded. Our ploy was to bring the nuns regular bunches of flowers. It was amazing how large the bouquets were from the time we grabbed many bunches from people's front yards on our long walk to school! I still don't know why many of the kids feared Catholic school discipline.

There was never a greater fear however than the week before Christmas when, after dark, young kids heard the clamour of a big, loud bell on their doorstep when a rotund Polish gentleman dressed as Santa would do the rounds to those parents whom he knew. I generally had to be coaxed into the lounge room but soon found ease when glasses of Vodka and many Na Zdrowie ("Good Health") salutations were made. I soon realised that Santa was human after all!

Boxing Day for us usually meant a drive and picnic to some cool location as respite from December's heat. Our Aussie neighbour had a huge 1948 Chevrolet Wagon and the outing for the day would be to Lake Wendouree in Ballarat, Moorabool Reservoir, or to Daylesford. The other memorable occasions for us kids then were the Polish / German Community organised bus trips to similar locations. In particular were the winter excursions for forest mushroom gathering to Bostock Reservoir and Mt. Macedon. Those outings certainly bonded many new adult friendships and cemented a young person's group of friends as well.

It was opportune that those places were beside lakes for us kids to go fishing during the picnic festivities. Many of us developed our angling skills there. There was no stronger bond between boys than fishing. We seemingly inherited some craft skills from our fathers' utilitarian days when they were still in Europe in us making our own fishing rods from bamboo sticks. The change came I remember when Coles opened in St Albans and a proper split cane rod and spinning reel combo cost 10 shillings. No fish in the Maribyrnong River or Jacksons Creek around Keilor was safe! The same pastimes were joyfully had catching eels and ferreting for rabbits in Kororoit Creek now choked by the residential expansion northward of Caroline Springs. Yes, they were the days.

St Albans High School

St Albans High School, Form 2c, 1959.

I started at St. Albans High in 1958 at the age of twelve and the initial years were

uneventful. I went through to Matriculation level with a keen aptitude for Art, Science and Geography. My parents elected to send me to a High School rather than the Sunshine Tech as mum had some great aspirations of me becoming a Doctor. We then had no choice in electing what subjects we preferred. I had practical talents in woodworking, artistry, a fondness of Geography and Science but at the time I despised Algebra, English History and Music. The dislike for algebra primarily stemmed from the fact that it was "too abstract" for me and totally meaningless. I think the algebra teacher then was Jack Rivett where, in typically prankish schoolboy cheek, we all gave him the name "Rivet-head". Jack was stern and serious. To us boys he displayed little humour. He never had any "pet" pupils and tarred all us kids with the same brush as being, pardon my colloquialism, just little disobedient buggers. None of us had any affinity with Mr. Rivett and his little beady eyes would stare you down during class as if to put the living fear of god into you if you could not comprehend an equation he had written on his blackboard. That impetuous character of Jack's ... and the speed at which he expected pupils to grasp the intricacy of algebra led to my dislike of that subject which I failed at every exam. It's ironic that in retrospect some many years later - with no thanks to algebra - my talents in lateral thinking and problem solving developed and benefited me throughout the whole of my later career path.

English History with Tom "Doc" Walsh was tolerated only because he encouraged us to use illustrations in our homework assignments. My talent at art was appreciated by Doc and I was always marked highly. Doc was also our sports master in those early years. Tom's persona was a happy one and in a flashback to those days, the most poignant recollection I have of the Doc is a short, chubby man who during football games when he would normally umpire, could never keep up with the play, thus deciding that at half time, to save all him exhaustion, the football would be bounced in the centre as usual, but only half the oval used for play with both rival teams kicking to the same goals. Doc's trademark however was his favourite pale blue hand- knitted coarse open-weave jumper with a big hole around the belly section.

Music classes were never looked forward to with our Miss Bowles. A fiery redhead, her school piano was the most sacred object. It was actually an obsession. Before touching the keys, pupils had to wash their hands in the toilets and present them to her. Lord help anyone that touched the ivories otherwise as a hefty smack over your fingers with a ruler was standard disciplinary issue. I think that woman did have some grandiose and probably frustrated ambition and never having made the grade as a concert pianist she took out her wrath on us pupils. Despite my marks in Music then always being under the 50 pass mark, in later years I became a reasonable guitarist and actually came to very much appreciate piano music.

Of similar strictness, but much less emotional, was the ginger-haired man generally respected by us lads was Ken Chilton, our woodwork teacher for the first two years. His nickname was "Chisel-head" for obvious reasons! Ken liked me and my friend Michael Chabiera as, with any given woodwork project that was set for a four week's completion, Mick and I would bowl this over well before deadline. Ken acknowledged our skill and in that extra time we had gained, both Mick and I were given extra timber and free reign to make things of our own choosing. In the end, Mick and I made reasonable scale models: Mine a WW II "Hawker Hurricane" and Mick's being a "Spitfire". We donated those to "Mr. Chisel-head" and our end-of-year marks I recall were somewhere at 92% pass rate.

"Art" was always a favourite subject and our teacher then was Laurie Burchell. He initially wasn't a bad sort of a bloke but had the mannerism of "hissing" through the corner of his mouth at times when he showed disdain. Our nick-name for him was "Mr. Snakey". I and then fellow mate Anthony "Ant" Laskowski were the top artists in the class and, as with woodwork, we would finish our assignments well before deadline. While Mr. Burchell was out of the room, Ant and I would "sneak-a-peak" at Burchell's folder on his teacher's desk, noting the next Art homework assignment. We would produce this at home in the next few days, a week well in advance of other students' presentation thinking this would give me and Ant some recognition for incentive and foresight. This however was not to Mr. Burchell's satis-faction and we copped heaps from then on after.

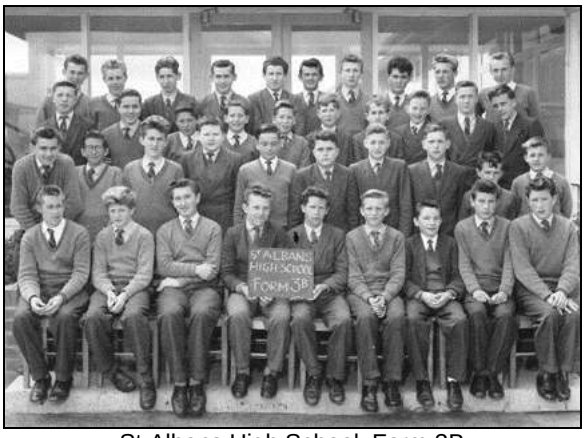
It was evident that Mr. Snakey had a vindictive streak towards me and the Ant. On a morning occasion of our Form's school excursion to the Melbourne Art Gallery, Burchell allowed me and Ant to walk with the rest of the class from the St. Albans High School to board the train at the St. Albans Station, and at last minute he told us we were not going. We were told to go back to class. The Ant and I instead went fishing to the Maribyrnong River at Green Gully, five miles away on our bicycles. Burchell sprung us there later that arvo and let down our bicycle tyres just for good measure.

Burchell was also the teacher that used all sleuth and cunning to nab boys smoking behind the shelter shed in the school grounds. In our eyes, that blotted his copybook more, and the more he exercised his omnipotence the more difficult we made his job as a teacher.

A friend some years older said he had seen Laurie Burchell at a Jazz Joint in Melbourne dressed in the vogue of those days in corduroy trousers, suede desert boots and duffle coat. I later did a painting as an Art Homework exercise depicting Laurie in the company of two “Jazz-type” ladies. Laurie really liked that work which I donated to him. In the following year in his classes I never had any further hassles with him. It seems art speaks all languages.

French classes were rarely looked forward to with George Strauss. He too was very strict and rather impatient when we could not immediately repeat the French phrases he conveyed. It was easy for George to speak French in the correct tone because he had a huge nose designed for the job, and we pupils were at the young age where our voices were still soprano. I persisted however and found that in future years that developing some comprehension in French, combined then with my ability to fluently speak Polish and rudimentary German, I impressed my later girlfriends and their Aussie parents. The sixties was still an era where European migrants were considered to have no class.

Associated to that “class distinction” many of us then 14 years and going to nearby dances (Sunshine and Footscray) had this deep down stigma of admitting to any Aussie girls we met that we lived in St. Albans. That was then a real black mark in the eyes of those from more affluent suburbs. I guess that changed in later years as the term "multicultural" became accepted and we lost the conspicuousness of our “wog” identities.



St Albans High School, Form 3B

I am not sure of the specific dates, but I do recall a period that may have been Form 3 at St. Albans, that a class room of us students went by bus to a brown brick, long established old school in Kingsville/Yarraville for a few months. I recall the bus operators as J. T. Manalack, a well-established name in Footscray. The bus company's sign was well displayed along their depot brick wall facing the train line just after the Middle Footscray railway station, which was then the jump off point off when we kids went to the Middle Footscray baths before Sunshine swimming pool was built. One lunchtime at that interim Kingsville school, adventurous me, walked out of the school yard, took a couple of street turns and got lost in that unfamiliar locale - I remember a railway crossing - and I was some hours later "found" by our then teacher, he doing a headcount for the bus trip back to St. Albans. I cannot identify that school. Maybe this part-time transfer of our class to Kingsville had something to do with the new wing extensions to the St. Albans High in compensation to alleviate the classroom overload?

Motor Bikes

Around Form 4 we were 16 years of age and in the urge to show “maturity”. Several of us bought second hand, cheap motor cycles, unregistered of course, and we were unlicensed. Those cycles however were now the natural transition from bicycles and an interim to getting one's first car. There was a period where we rode these motor cycles to high school, parking them along the wire fence of the east school boundary before the present Grantham Green housing development existed.

This was tolerated by the school management as we did no hooning on the school grounds and I recall two male teachers that actually took interest in our cycles as we gathered around them during our lunch breaks, without starting up the cycles, nor riding. Riding motorcycles to school however was short lived where one owner overstepped the liberty and in school uniform lairized on his cycle in The Arcade, Main Road East. Word filtered through to school and that was that. The Arcade then in the eyes of many did not have a very good reputation. The sixties were the era of Bodgies and Widgies and St.Albans had a strong element. At the time however this identity was not associated with crime, but more so rivalry between St. Albans and Sunshine adolescent males.

The Arcade

I recall a shop in that dingy Arcade which was a hang-out for older teenagers and I remember these "Bodgies" hanging around with the likes of George Swadiak, Socrates, Robert Punicki, Victor Brooks et al. It had one of the first, large Espresso coffee machines, rudimentary tables and from memory a pool table. I distinctly remember it also having one of those “table soccer” games where on an odd occasion a friend and I would play a game, although when the “hoods” arrived it was an uncomfortable place to be. The TAB was also in that area and my father used to place and collect bets there with further advice to me that from observation of the element in that locale I was sternly advised not to frequent, which I duly heeded.

We were already well “hooked” otherwise with fishing. The few months of ownership of our

motor cycles gave us an opportunity to learn basic motor mechanics that were advantageous as we got our first cars, mine being a 1956 FJ Holden.

It wasn't the coppers that made us dispose of our motor cycles, but our parents for fear either of accident but more so concern that we would get involved with the wrong element. I must admit that the feeling of "freedom" one had on motorcycle in those days was the ultimate "escape" from the then disciplines of schooling, strict parental guidance and the stresses and emotions most teenagers go through.

The Law in Action

In those early sixties we saw the posting of Constable Terry Mangles to the St. Albans Police Station (now the Funeral Parlour site). Constable Mangles was relatively young and from memory came from a country town. I can recall when he and another constable would regularly "pounce" on the Arcade and at times find the hoods had fled through the back exit. Regardless, they were aware of names and diligently pursued those in question.

Illustrative of police determination to show the hoods who was boss, I recall one day them visiting the home of a male wanted for some motoring offence. The remedy there was not to issue a summons. One of the constables got in the offenders' vehicle and using burly legs and strong feet physically bent sideways both that car's brake and clutch pedal making those controls inoperative.

Detective Bill Betson was head of that force in St. Albans at that time. Bill was very much respected by all for his very gentlemanly manner but always with thoroughness. There were a few youngsters like us that, for what was a minor misdemeanour, were taught to respect the law if not instill a fear to go further astray. It was customary to be taken to the then Sunshine Police Station and Courthouse and be sat in the foyer, no further ado, and later told to get home and tell one's parents of the event. Quite often the Police would make a later casual call to a home to check with parents if "the boy" had told them of their short term apprehension.

I never really got into any police trouble except once, when I was about 14 years and an old a mate and I were questioned walking down the street like "big nobs" lighting up one cigarette after another, having a few puffs, then throwing the near-intact ciggie away. We admitted (in truth) that we had found some 30 packets of "Turf Cork Tipped" cigarettes stashed under a boxthorn bush on the site of the present St. Albans Hotel. Later, a youthful gang on "the other side of the tracks" was found to have broken into an Arcade shop to steal them.

Graduation

Recollections of my last two years at St. Albans High are fairly uneventful. I left at end of year in 1963 and on 4th February 1964, six weeks before my eighteenth birthday, I got my first job as a Despatch Clerk with Containers Limited Packaging in West Footscray. It might now be seen in retrospect and credit that it was the schooling during those years at St. Albans High where on application for that job at Containers Ltd I was the first applicant and hired immediately.

As the School's motto was "Truth Is Our Light" there has never been a dark memory of those school days.

Postscript

I think I have exhausted most of what was on my

memorabilia photo files. There's a missing chapter in the era of the mid 1960s of the Mathoura days. Those photos were lost in my relocation from St Albans to Howlong, now 15 years ago. There are some fond memories however of roo and rabbit shooting ... and fishing at Boundary Bend, at the junction of the Gulpa Creek, thereabouts where the Edward River meets the Murray ... and camps opposite Cutty (John) Dougherty's shack on the Victorian side of the Murray. Brundelski will remember the morning after a cool night lifting the bonnet of his then white Holden to check oil and water prior to a day's shoot, with a big red-bellied black snake coiled on the warm motor. There of course were those memorable moments of those late afternoon, thirst quenching session, progressing in stages through all three of the pubs in Mathoura, from the bottom pub, middle pub then the top pub. In 1962, Wishi, Jeff, myself and Stepas Launikonis started a beer drinkers' club in St Albans called the "Alkes-Stevo" Club. The 'stevo' was conceived by Stepas, in apparent glorification as a diminutive of his (Stepas) name. I made each of us a white T-shirt, on the back in then texta-pen I drew a large bottle top with the wording "Sponsored by Carlton & United Breweries". I remember some local drinkers in a Mathoura pub offering to buy the shirts from us for then 10 Pounds each!!! Silly us didn't sell. I was silly that I didn't continue producing printed T-shirts as that concept was then totally new. I could have now been a Millionaire! Only on photo here of that camping spot. It's 1965 when Max Heidinger and I did a trip. We spun up 15 redfin in 10 minutes using "Hog-back" spinners.

David Miller is Wishy Dawidowicz's brother-in-law. David married Wishy's sister, then Halina Dawidowicz, who with Wishi, lived in Scott Avenue, St Albans, next door to Dr. Henry. Through that affiliation with Wishy, David

befriended Dr. Henry and with Jeff Brundel, they were a threesome that would go hunting and fishing, and while I still lived in Melbourne until moving to Sydney in 1975, I was the fourth member of this group. The group was called "Miller's Guerrilla's" as David was an Engineer in the Australian Army. He started as head of RAEME at the Bandiana Barracks (across the road from Bonegilla) in the mid 1960s. He served in Vietnam in the Engineers corps and as a Lieutenant-Colonel circa 1976 went to Schrivenham Officers College (England) to gain his Masters Degree in Weapons and Ballistics.

From circa late 1990s, David then divorced from Halina and marrying Beverly, moved from Canberra to Howlong where David set up his home business as a Consultant to the Russian Space Agency in the conversion of post arms race Russian Military rockets to Ruski satellite launching. He did similar for the Brazilian Government in the 2005+ years and shortly thereafter similar "discussions" with the Turkish Ambassador. David hence to all and sundry is referred to as "The Rocket Scientist".

By marriage to Halina, David had two children, both now in their early 40s. Michelle in the 1990's was the first female commander of the warship HMAS Melbourne then on active partrols in the Timor Sea. Michelle some years ago in Canberra married husband Mark, who was an ace RAAF pilot. They both still live in Canberra and now have Senior postings in Navy and RAAF diplomacies. Andrew (Drew) Miller has a doctorate in Human Physiology and a senior lecturer at a Newcastle NSW university. His profile is expansive on Linkedin and associated Sports Training/ Development websites.

Jeff Brundel leaving school in St Alban's worked in a qualified mechanical capacity and graduated to the field of cranes and heavy lifting equipment. Jeff for several years has been the President of Australia "Crane Safe". There is plenty of info on the web. I mentioned in past references that Jeff married Barbara Lubicz. Jeff and Barbara live near me in Howlong. Andy Lubicz lives on a farmlet in Beechworth. I must catch up with him shortly.

Bernie Kokot, 8 March 2016.

Tatiana (Tanya) Korinfsky: Actor, Director, Poet, International Artist

It all began in April 1950, when George and Edith (nee Enepetz) Korinfsky boarded the boat "General M L Hersey" at Naples, Italy, with their three children Maria, Alexander, and Tatiana to begin a new life in Australia, following the ravages of WWII. George was of Russian background and his wife, Edith, of Latvian descent. George had been drafted into the Soviet Army, and had escaped the fate of his brother, Vladimir, who had been sent to a Siberian labour camp for anti-government activities and where he was subsequently executed, because in the chaos of war, the authorities were not exactly sure where George was. Their Mother also spent ten years in Siberia, for being the Mother of an “Enemy of the State”. George eventually became a prisoner of war, as so many of his countrymen, and was eventually released by the Americans. Interestingly, his first choice of relocation as a displaced person was to the United States, but due to an abscessed tooth, was unable to make the interview, thus losing his place. He was offered Australia, instead. That’s how we ended up here — all due to an inflamed tooth!

Edith & George Korinfsky with Alex & Maria 1947

Like so many others, we started out life in Bonegilla camp. Eventually, scraping together enough money to buy land in St. Albans, they built a modest dwelling of two rooms, complete with wood stove for heating and cooking. Washing was done in a copper outside and bathing took place in a large aluminium tub, often outside when the weather permitted.

I have memories of long (to us children) walks to the Maribyrnong River (behind Errington Rd) with family friends and swimming in the water holes. In the evenings, our parents often visited neighbours or friends, and I can remember playing on the floor in the same room

as the adults, and just seeing various legs under the table as we played. You heard vague voices and stories being exchanged among the adults, and it seemed that people were happy and contented to some degree. They were safe, independent, could find work, and had a roof over their heads. Their children could be educated and live safely in their new environment. Pleasure and fun was found in simple activities and there were always other parents and children around. So we have mainly wonderful and happy memories of our earlier childhood.

Life became a little more challenging when our Mother died at the age of 32 (due to the effects of high blood pressure). Her funeral was attended by many people — testament to her friendly and generous character, and the community we lived in. She had come from a well-to-do family and I often marvel at how she adapted to life in a place like St. Albans, cooking on a wood stove, getting the iceman to deliver ice for the ice-box and trying to keep things cool in the blistering summers, washing sheets and clothes in the copper, and working night shift in the canteen at The Herald newspaper in the city. Nevertheless, she always made time for her family and others, no matter what. Christmas was always a special time, with white linen table cloth, candles, huge Christmas tree, carols, special food and drink, and those without family or a place to go were invited to join us. All this in the small room that served as a living/dining/bedroom for parents! The other room was occupied by us three children and the wood stove. When we added to our living space by having a small one-room structure placed next to the bungalow, instead of it being used by the family, our parents installed a homeless and jobless compatriot! He repaid them by giving us three children basin haircuts while our parents were away!

School in the beginning was at the only primary school that existed in St. Albans at the time, located way past the railway station, on West Esplanade. Even now, I am amazed that it was just expected of five-year-olds to walk all that distance, unaccompanied and unsupervised. On the way home, we called in at the shops and spent our pennies, thruppences, and sixpences, buying lollies and swap cards and marbles. The shop near the station was a veritable Aladdin's cave, filled with all manner of treasures and wonderful items, and the shopkeeper always obliging and patient as we peered into the glass cabinets and shelves and took ages to decide on our purchases. Mother always came to the school to see the teachers, end-of-year days, and I suppose parent-teachers meetings.

Father made a living by cutting wood (on the land he bought near Kyneton) and delivering it to the locals, so we had a sense of community and belonging right from the start. He then started a saw-milling business, supplying timber for housing. Again, looking back, he simply adapted to the new reality, and never really complained that his teaching and educational qualifications were not recognised here. He was not alone. There were many who had been writers, poets, teachers, engineers, and professional people, but who ended up in factories, labouring jobs, restaurants, and other low-paying industries in order to put food on the table and ensure their children got an education.

We were lucky also that our parents never forgot their heritage and told many a story of life in their respective home countries, giving us a concrete sense of our heritage. Curiously, we just accepted our two realities and identities.

After Mother passed away, Father decided it was time to put his efforts into activities aimed at countering the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. He spent many hours and his own money funding such activities, including the publishing of a Russian-language news paper which he sent around the world - some of his readers were Igor Sikorsky (of Sikorsky helicopter fame) and remnants of the Russian Imperial family in France. Donations sometimes dribbled in, but were mainly small, and Father took a job at a printing factory to supplement income. Thus, money was always in short supply for paying electricity bills and buying clothes, but he felt it was his duty to follow this path, after his experiences growing up in the Soviet Union and the fate of his family. With an unbroken line of priests (since the introduction of Christianity in Russia in 988 AD) on the male side of the family, and also including poets and architects, the family's fortunes suffered after the Russian Revolution in 1917.

After many years of struggle, sleepless nights, and hard times he finally chose to switch to teaching in 1970 — at St. Albans High School! — after his qualifications were finally recognised through Melbourne University.

Primary School — St. Albans East

After the second primary school was built in St. Albans East in 1956, life became a little easier for many. Now the walk was about 10 minutes and we often came home for lunch, when Mother made sure we always got a hot meal, often inviting neighbours children to join us — all this still produced on the wood stove.

We often went to the school after hours to see the Charlie Chaplin films that were being shown — a real treat in a pre-TV era. I remember also that we students were involved

in a tree-planting exercise to beautify the rather stark surroundings of the school. Each student planted a tree around the fence perimeter and I remember not being terribly happy at my assigned tree — a Lilly Pilly — I guess a foretaste of my intense interest in gardening and plants later in life! When TV was introduced, I remember going to someone's house to watch Cowboy and Indian films and Walt Disney cartoons. However, I also loved reading and spent many an hour after lights out under the blankets with a torch reading book after book. Then, we were often packed off to bed when it was still light (probably summer)!

Grade V, St Albans East Primary 1956

We generally led a very free life, however, often being allowed to play in the street, visiting friends' homes, and roaming around unsupervised. We kept ourselves amused with all kinds of physical games, often making up our own games and using our own imaginations, and dragging out household items or making things out of branches, wood, or whatever was to hand. We swapped cards and marbles, played hop scotch, and when the Olympics came to Melbourne in 1956, the street became a sprinting track and our backyard was turned into a discus, javelin, high jump, and long jump area.

When we had to come in to eat, it was often a roast lamb with mint sauce and roasted vegetables, which our Mother somehow perfected, despite being of European background. We were fortunate also in growing up with many pets (some were simply strays which followed Mother home, and they were all taken in and given a home), and when our pet dog died, Mother helped us to arrange a proper funeral and burial, and so we learnt many things about life and death. She also engendered in us a love of animals, gardening, and Nature.

Secondary School — St. Albans High School

There was much excitement when a secondary school was finally established in St. Albans in 1957. I attended from 1960, the 5th year of its existence. It was just around the corner from our house in Millawa Avenue and we had to pass the house of the Headmaster (Mr James Barker, at that time) to and from school. He and his wife, Mrs Bernice Barker, also a teacher, lived on the corner of Millawa Ave and St. Albans Road East. We were somewhat intimidated walking past their house, as they both seemed a little strict.

St Albans High was a wonderful school to attend in those days. We had very dedicated teachers, mainly, and although there was less parent involvement, because both parents mostly worked, there was a real community spirit about the school. Most teachers were very committed to furthering our educational development, but were also heavily involved in extra-curricular activities, and just supporting and encouraging us individually — they seemed to genuinely care about the students. Teachers who had a profound impact on me were Barry Rayner (Maths), Joan Butler (English), and Alison Gliddon (English). Through Mrs Gliddon I came to appreciate and love Milton's "Paradise Lost" and went on to choose Tennessee Williams plays as my optional study selection — recently I have been undertaking to do Williams' plays in my theatre work, a spark that was ignited all those years ago! I am sure I would not have earned Second Class Honours in English at Matriculation level had it not been for Mrs Gliddon. I would here also like to acknowledge the kindness and support of the Haynes family, the school cleaners for many years. We often went to their house to watch TV, drinking cups of tea accompanied by biscuits — very decent and generous people.

From about the age of 15, during school holidays, I got jobs in sandwich bars and cafes in order to be able to earn a little cash for needed or desired items. It was very exciting, and I felt very grown-up taking the red train (the 'old rattler') into the city all by myself.

The student body was made up of students from many parts of Europe in the main. Luckily, most parents left the past behind them in Europe, so most students mixed easily and happily, and history was left to, well, "history". Australians were in the minority. But Greeks sat with Germans, Australians with Russians, Poles with Italians, and so on.

At some point I became House Captain of Kurrajong (can't remember which year, however!), played with the very successful softball team, which won countless Western Division trophies, and was also a Prefect in my final year. Somehow, I also won quite a few races in the swimming championships, although I remember vividly almost drowning myself in the Butterfly event, mainly because I couldn't really do the stroke properly, but winning it through sheer determination! I loved all aspects of school and it provided a kind of safe haven and stimulating space when the going sometimes got a bit rough. I suspect this was true for quite a few students.

My best friends were Heather Goddard (re-established contact just this year after 45 or so

years!), whose parents were extraordinarily kind and generous to me because of our family situation, Cathy Hatjiandreou (again, meeting this year for the first time since graduating from high school at our private high school reunion), whose steadiness and maturity and the long walks and talks that we shared really helped me through some difficult times — and I recall visiting her home and being fascinated by Greek culture and food; and Jan Griffin, whom I saw every year on my annual visits from Japan, where I lived for 25 years. And whom I saw frequently when I moved back to Melbourne about 12 years ago. A good, true, and generous friend. I was devastated when she passed away due to brain cancer in 2011. I am still in touch with her Mother, who is now in her 90s!

One other special friend I would like to mention is Laurie Schwab. We met every year as well, when I visited Melbourne from overseas. I was working as a journalist for part of my time in Japan, as was he, in Melbourne. He was a smart, funny, warm person — also dearly missed. Imagine my surprise when I was walking around the lake at Daylesford some years ago, and decided to take a rest on a bench. There, inscribed on that particular bench, was a dedication to Laurie! It was a special moment.

1981: Milica Jankovic, Erika Kolin, Katrin Schwab, Ivan Volkov, Laurie Schwab, Tanya Korinfsky.

There were other students and teachers, too numerous to mention, who, together, made St. Albans High such a special place. To all of them, we owe a debt of gratitude that we have so many wonderful and special memories. To our parents, as well, we owe much — many of them were in a difficult situation, uprooted as they were and often with traumatic past memories and experiences, and some less able to cope than others — nevertheless, with maturity and empathy, we should acknowledge their sacrifices and contributions in helping make us the people we are today.

Life after St. Albans High School

After leaving St. Albans High School, from 1966 I attended Melbourne University, having gained a Commonwealth Scholarship and also a Conzinc Riotinto Scholarship to study Japanese. My majors were Japanese and Political Science, with a sub-major in English. Right through university, on weekends and term holidays, I worked at the Southern Cross Hotel in the Coolibah dining room, enabling me to save some money.

Subsequently, in early 1970, I waved family and friends goodbye and went to Japan on a half-cargo half-passenger vessel. Talk about a rite of passage! I spent about 25 years in total in Japan, returning to Melbourne every year to see family and friends. Life was very interesting and educational in Japan — I feel lucky that I had the opportunity to experience a different culture and different ways of doing things and viewing life. I was fortunate, too, in having fascinating and varied professional opportunities — I worked in journalism, publishing, and teaching (both at universities and at cultural centres), did editing and narration, and also worked for the United Nations University (in the Publications Unit), which was headquartered in Tokyo. Meanwhile I also engaged in theatre and Toastmaster's, and studied art, traditional Japanese instruments, and Buddhism. Traveling extensively, I went to Europe, the UK, and the US, as well as nearly all the countries between Australia and Japan.

In 2005, I decided to shift into the next phase of my life, leaving Japan and coming back to Australia, to settle at Mt Macedon. What a surprise to learn that Svetlana Bohudski was living up the road from me. And that Neville Thurgood (father of Derek Thurgood) was President of the Mount Players, a theatre group I became a member of! Since then I have focussed on my theatre activities (playwriting, directing, acting, producing), photography, and art. I spend a good deal of the year in London and New York, exhibiting my art and photos, continuing to study Buddhism and write haiku poetry, and also doing theatre work. I also regularly visit Japan, which has had such a profound influence on my life.

I went to my first private reunion of St. Albans High School students this year (February 2017) at Nick and Jutta Szwed's — what fun, what excitement to see friends and teachers from those long-ago years — and to learn of Nick and Joe Ribarow's wonderful project. Though I have wandered far and wide since those days, somehow I feel a great sense of comfort and contentment in being able to connect the dots of many roads traveled, including the St. Albans journey that began all those years ago!

Tanya Korinfsky, 2017

Andy Kratsis: President Of School Council, St Albans Secondary College

We came to Australia in August 1955. My family ancestry is Greek, but I was born in Egypt, as were my parents. My grandparents were from the Greek Islands, the Dodecanese, and Rhodes is the capital. My father's side was from Kastellorizon, the island closest to Turkey, and my mother's side came from Leros. The Dodecanese were occupied by the Italians until - I wouldn't be surprised if it was - 1946, when the last one was handed over. The grandparents migrated independently to Egypt in the 1800s. I was born there in 1944.

Multiculturalism was very much alive in Egypt during those years, particularly in the 'thirties and 'forties, but even in the early 1900s, because of the arrival of people from different places like Italy, Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Armenia ... People were looking for a new life, they found it in Egypt, and became part of that cosmopolitan population because they brought a little bit of Europe with them. We were very much part of the lifestyle.

My father spoke seven languages; he was by no means a highly educated man but spoke seven languages and learnt that through community contact. My mother was the same. She finished Grade 4 at primary school level but educational standards were at a higher level even at primary school and general knowledge was important, maths, writing and languages, because it was a multicultural nation. You had to know Egyptian; Arabic was the compulsory subject.

I learnt Arabic at a young age but am ashamed to admit that I can no longer read or write that any more. Between 1944, when I was born, and 1955, when we left, I had a good introduction to life and culture in Egypt.

Emigrating to Australia

My family were sponsored to come to Australia as independent migrants, and were paying off the fares to a Catholic organisation in Fitzroy for about five years. We were sponsored by my uncle, my mother's brother, who was living in Pennel Avenue, St Albans. I can still remember that first day stopping at the Braybrook Hotel. Ballarat Road was an empty stretch and when you got over the bridge leading to St Albans it was as flat as a desert; it was barren land, and even along the railway line there was nothing. The one factory in St Albans Road when you first came over the bridge was Rubbertex, then nothing until well after Furlong Road. We stayed with my uncle until dad got a job at Nettlefolds, and that was his job for all the years that he worked here. In Egypt he made a living as a salesman, but here he became a process worker.

Settling in St Albans

When we first arrived we were living in Albion for a little while and I went to Grade 6 at the Albion Primary School from August 1955 to the end of the year. Then we came to St Albans and lived in View Street. Nearly every second person in the street was either German or Polish.

Once dad was working we were able to start renting a place at 90 View Street. Both mum and dad worked, as did many of the couples who settled in St Albans. Mum had never worked in a factory in all her life until she came here. I'm sure it was the same for many families of the other nationalities. My parents made friends quickly with the Polish people next door; the wife worked at a tannery called Pizzeys in Richmond, and got mum a job there. It was hard work, particularly for women. They had to stretch hides and stood in water most of the day. Mum worked from 6:00 in the morning to 6:00 in the evening, so she would leave pretty early and come home pretty late. Dad worked similar hours, so they both worked pretty hard.

Dad would tell me that at the end of the week people would say: "Hey, Steve. Payday today. We going to the pub?"

Dad always said no: "No pub for me. I've got my family." He didn't want people to think that he didn't want to mix, but they had to get this money together. In no time they got some money to pay the deposit on the property at 230 Main Road East, opposite the High School site. They built a home and the family lived there for quite a few years. I just walked across the road and was at school. I was never late for school, and if I ever forgot my watch I could always jump over the fence and go home for it.

Learning English

When I first came to Australia I had a little bit of English because we had studied it in Egypt, but I don't think I was very proficient. I can remember on the long stretch between Colombo and Fremantle being the only one in our group who could ask questions. I would ask in very round tones, "When do we ar-rive in Au-stra-lia?" So I spoke English to that extent.

When I was at Albion Primary School a kid would take me for a walk around the school and tell me the name of objects as he pointed to them: table, door, fence, window, and so on. For a while I thought clouds were called 'flag' because the kid was pointing to the flag but I thought he was pointing to the clouds behind the flag. That's the sort of problem I had in starting off in a full English language school. English expression was a battle for us at the start. If you didn't do well in the early years, when you were doing English Literature in Form 5 and 6 it was hard stuff reading the literature and answering

the questions on what you had read. I got around it by doing Form 4 twice. My marks weren't too good first time round because my English was not well developed. Redoing the intermediate level meant I was ready to go on. I was also more mature by then.

High School

I remember vividly when I started at St Albans High School in 1956, maybe because I was interested in school and took a part in it.

St Albans High School 1956, Form 1d. Andy Kratsis is in the back row, first on the left.

With Jeff Barlow I was one of the first bell monitors at the school in 1957. It was only a hand bell at the time, but I had a watch, which was my qualification for the job. A teacher carried out this task when the school started at Sunshine and then it was shared by students when we came to St Albans in 1957.

Having a watch was a big thing then. I don't know what I used to do but I must have been a bit tough on the watch; it was my dad's, even though I wore it to school. My father would say "You can't play football while you've wearing your watch," so every time it broke I put it back where it belonged. My dad went through five watches when I was at High School.

The school was like a family in those days. In the first year there were about 150 students. For a lot of us, because we were migrants, it was a learning experience in more ways than just academically. We had between 25 and 30 students per class. Many people who were freshly arrived migrants: Polish people, German people, Italian people, a few Yugoslavs, all sorts of nationalities. The Maltese and Croatians came a bit later. There were not many Greek migrants at this stage, they came later also.

The senior years at the High School were serious years. There weren't many senior students as a lot of people went to Sunshine to complete their Matric.

People took an interest in sport, and I can remember from time to time surreptitiously listening to overseas test cricket on our own little radio sets in the library. People are sports-minded now, but it was different then. Doc Walsh was always sports minded and he was a mad South Melbourne supporter. He was also the sports master for the school. I remember him saying things like: "As Magellan arrived in Portugal in ... Joe, did you mark out the goal squares for today?" Girls didn't like him because he was always interested in boys' sport. But he was a fair teacher. At that time the girls were separated from the boys - that was the tradition, though it was changing, because in the later years I sat behind girls in the same row. We had prefects, of course. They were very, very strict.

Andy Kratsis and other House Captains, 1961

Starting Work

My first job after high school was in the Bank of New South Wales, and my first posting was at the St Albans Branch, 48 Alfrieda Street. I worked there for nearly four years. My last posting was at the Brooklyn Branch in Geelong Road. The day after I left there, Ronald Ryan and his accomplice Walker robbed that branch. My ex-colleagues were telling me they were ducking for cover because some shots were fired. Ryan and Walker were eventually arrested.

After finishing with the bank I became a costing clerk at Hardie Rubber, previously Rubbertex. I did that job for nearly three years. Then a manager from my banking days said there was job going at British Tube Mills, so I applied for that and did that for ten years.

Tertiary Studies

I then went to college and did my Business Studies Certificate at Footscray Institute. That was in the early 'seventies, when I was in my mid twenties. In 1983-84 I did my Bachelor of Arts in Multicultural Science at VUT. I was so thrilled to be doing the course, even though at times I was tired and the younger students would say, "Andy, wake up - you're snoring." Mr Pascoe was the senior lecturer and I apologised to him for falling asleep, but he understood my situation because I was also working full-time at the time. I did pass the course despite my occasional snooze in class.

Working at Massey Ferguson

After British Tube Mills I went to Massey Ferguson. They used to call me the Chief Tyre Buyer. In fact, I did buy the tyres for all Australia for Massey Ferguson. A lot of the equipment came in a shell state, which was 78% completed, from Germany, Canada, and South

America. The other 22%, by law, had to be Australian made. My job was to work out when the equipment was arriving and make sure the correct tyres were available, because the wheels were then installed and they could be moved about. Then in 1976 they came in shell form all the way to the factory in Sunshine.

Massey Ferguson was that part of Sunshine from Ballarat Road all the way to Devonshire Road. It was a big place. I started there as a costing clerk. My boss wasn't formally qualified but he'd been there since the age of 14 and he was 56 at the time, so he'd spent 42 years there. He'd started as the boy who followed the cart and cleaned up the horses' droppings; they'd go from Devonshire Road to the foundries with parts and memo deliveries. Then he became tea boy and later costing clerk. Over 30 years people left, died, or resigned, and he became an important person because he stayed. When they talked of the 1938 header - the farmers who still had one were looking for some screw attached to a fin or something - he'd know what they were talking about and where it was. He worked his way up from being one of the costing clerks to the chief costing clerk.

There were over a million costing cards, one for every part used in the factory. We updated the cards every time there was a change in the price. By the time you got to the millionth card you'd start again. You had a blue pen for normal costing, a red pen for negative, and a pencil for temporary figures. This particular guy had the three taped together so he wouldn't waste time picking up and putting down the pens. Each morning he'd be there at 8:20 doing his exercises before the start of work, then he'd put his head down and work until tea time. He was dedicated to the extreme. Although I was correct in my figures, no one could be as dedicated as he was.

In 1973 it was the Costing Department's job to update all cards to the metric system. After that I became part of the program planning team, where I was involved in buying tyres. My job was also to get the $4 million stock they had on hand down to $2 million by making sure the stock-takes were correct and that the old tyres were going out.

Retrenched

In 1977 there was a downward trend in the Australian agricultural industry, which did a lot of damage to local manufacturing. I was one of 360 people who were retrenched that day - one day you're there, next day you're not. I had been there about five years. One week later I got another job. That's the way things were then: unemployment didn't exist and you didn't have to wait for six months to find your next position. I walked into another job as accounts receivable supervisor, because I'd finished my business studies course by then. I was at Ajax Pumps, near where Wiltshire Files was in Tottenham.

Holidays in Greece

In 1973, prior to me starting at Massey Ferguson, I went to Greece for the first time. I had married a Greek girl, Athena, and we went to see her family. It was an eye-opener, the way of life there. They were from the Peloponnisos, in Southern Greece, and they lived in a paradise of a place called Pylos. I don't know why people left there, but I haven't lived there so it's easy for me to say. That there were no jobs is the main reason. The Greeks say, even the ones I meet now, that we left to make room for our brothers and sisters to live a proper life. The reduction in the family size must have helped families survive on limited income. The ones who stayed behind in Greece did farming and were able to establish themselves. Twenty years later when the brother who'd migrated to Australia came back to see his family he would see the changes. Socially, they had a better life there. I don't know if you'd consider having a siesta in the afternoon as having a better life, but it certainly made them more relaxed.

I recall going to the town square. Church finished at 9:30 in the morning on a Sunday, and I walked down to the square by the sea. I ordered a bottle of Coke, while a local sitting at the next table ordered a small Turkish coffee. I finished my Coke in about two minutes, guzzled it down, and my neighbour was still drinking his coffee one hour later, as he leisurely read the paper column by column. We could do that also, but we were as wound up as clocks, watching the clock: what time is it? where are we going? They don't have that attitude.

In the evening, it was different to the life of my kids. As soon as we had the evening meal at 6 o'clock the children would disappear upstairs and dress up, because they expected us to take them for a walk as a family. We'd walk down to the square. I recall doing this ritual further inland in Tripoli, which is in Central Peleponese. To me it was like Pentridge Prison - even though there were beautiful trees - because all I could see were people walking, sometimes 10, 12, 15 abreast, up and down the square. In my imagination I thought this is what it would be like if I were in gaol walking in their little quadrangle. But after that they sat down and had a coffee and a chat, and it was very civilised.

I struck up a friendship with the headmaster of the local school, whose brother was home on holidays from Canada. I also met a local accountant and the chief of police. They invited me to join their group. At 1:00 o'clock, before they had their afternoon meal and siesta, they'd sit and have a coffee or an Ouzo by the sea. The brother from Canada was probably similar to my way of thinking, because he'd say:

"We shouldn't be wasting our time here. We should go home and paint Mum's home."

His brother would say: "What's wrong with you? You are a stranger to me. You've been gone twenty years and now you've come here to enjoy yourself. This is holiday time. We are going to enjoy your time here as two brothers. You are a stranger. All you do is keep looking at your watch. Where are we going? We are going nowhere! Forget looking at your watch, forget the time, just relax and enjoy life. All I'm going to remember of you is you looking at your watch. We are not going to paint the house while you are here. Get it out of your mind. Enjoy yourself."

Working at St Albans Hotel

I think we've become too oriented to running with the clock rather than being a bit more relaxed and enjoying life as we go. I've done my share of having two or three jobs at a time. When I was working at Tube Makers and Massey Ferguson I was also working at the St Albans Hotel. I fact I was the first one who worked at the bottle shop there. When I started I knew nothing about the industry but someone was helping me set up the bottle shop. The year I started it was run by Pearl Industries. Mr Pearl also owned the Tottenham Hotel and the Melton Shopping Centre. I knew nothing about the industry but Mr Pearl could tell who was working and he respected people who worked well. He came in Christmas Day and said: "Because you are working for me on your Christmas day I want you to take a bottle home for your family. I reached for a cheap bottle and he said, "No, no. Top shelf." He took me inside and said "Do you like this?" It was an expensive imported Italian liqueur. He gave me a box of those to take home for the family. He was a wonderful guy.

I'll never forget the day we started in March 1968. It was a warm Saturday night and 22 of us were hired for various jobs and to serve drinks, but people were guzzling drinks in the fridge while they were serving, and by the end of the night they were sozzled. I was working to pay off my home and so I wasn't drinking - it was also an honesty thing, and there was another worker with a similar approach. Jack Ross was in charge, and at the end of the night he called us together and pointed to me. "You, come here. And you, come here," he said, pointing to this other guy. "The rest of you, go to the office and collect your pay and don't come back."

From then on he taught me about the hotel industry and I learnt a lot from him over the years. I worked part time. I also worked at the Moonee Ponds Tavern for a while.

School Councils

I was Chairperson at St Albans Heights Primary School Council for about ten years while my kids were there. I was also the first President of the Parent's Association at Keilor Downs Secondary College in its opening year, 1984. Education is part of me. I often think I should have been a teacher. I respect the dedicated teachers who work in the system, and there is a lot of them. The dedicated teacher is a wonderful person.

Andy Kratsis (R) and School Council colleagues

I started getting involved in the St Albans High School Council in 1987 as a community member half way through the year. In 1988 my youngest son was here from '88 to '93. I was Vice President for a couple of years and then in 1990 I became President. The person before me was Tony Chandler, who'd done a magnificent job in bringing the school round. In the education system, schools go through cycles of good times and bad times, and it's the processes you put in place in the good times that help you in the bad times. That cycle could be over twenty years, and all schools go through it. Tony Chandler had come in during the tough times with Principal Stewart Homer, and they took it by the scruff of the neck with the help of the hard-working staff and made it a real good school. Now our results are tremendous. In 1990 Tony retired and I was elected to the President's job and have been there ever since.

(L-R) Alex Andrianopoulos, Andy Kratsis, Natalie Cvijeticanin, Laurie Schwab, Loue Traianou with Joan Kirner, Minister for Education.

In 1990 it was decided to adopt a new name for the school in line with the new thinking and new perceptions about secondary education within the community. I was pleased that Joan Kirner, the Minister for Education, accepted our

invitation to come and formally commemorate the occasion.

Each year I say to the people: "Maybe it's time for me to go," because I don't want people to think that I own the place or that I don't want to budge. But I always get support and the support is genuine and sincere. When I can be a part of helping, that keeps me going.

Students

The students now have more say, and they are listened to. They're encouraged to take part. Even in School Council we encourage input from students. I tried to introduce that at the beginning and my son was on School Council for a couple of years. What I like about the school is that the students are not rude students. I'm sure they've got their problems like everyone else at times, but they also contribute to the running of the school with ideas and comments on discussion papers that are sent out.

Andy Kratsis and students, 1993.

They've come back to school uniforms in my time, about eight years ago. I believe in uniforms. When I was providing financial counselling at the Health Centre I would see the problems that a lot of single parents had in dressing their kids with peer pressure to get Levis at $80 rather than the Target brand at $20. There were similar arguments about expensive brand runners. That was a big problem when schools didn't have uniforms.

Other Community Activities

I was Keilor Council's Citizen of the Year in 1993, an award I appreciated receiving, not just because it was a recognition of my community activity, but more importantly because it was a recognition of the efforts of many people in the background who supported me in this voluntary work. In particular I should include my wife, Athena, for the many years of diligent work at home supporting the family whilst I was away at meetings.

I'm also a Justice of the Peace. I believe JPs are needed in society and in future will have a lot more say in helping the police; for example, Justices are now the independent watchdogs on the Maribyrnong Detention Centre overseeing the assessment of refugees arriving in Australia.

Family

I had two boys. I tried to be a friend to my kids and not just a father. I encouraged them to read as much as they could. I was strict in that respect. But I also encouraged sport and spent time with them watching sport. I think the second generation migrants had it a lot easier than the first generation.

Steven is now 33 and a Doctor of Science from Monash Uni. His first job was lecturing at Murdoch University at Perth. Then his professor recommended him for a Swiss company job importing equipment for the wine-making and mining industries - very, very big fields. Then he completed his MBA. People in that age group never stop their education. I suppose I'm the same because I've done my business studies in my thirties, and my BA in my forties. I believe the current group of students will change their career seven times, and each time will do it formally.

My other son Chris is Assistant Manager with the Geelong West branch of the Commonwealth Bank. He is a product of St Albans Secondary College.

I am extremely proud of both of them.

Andy Kratsis, December 2005.

Andy and classmates, 60th anniversary celebrations

Lydia Marsh nee Lagan: Public Servant

I would like to briefly share with you my life of growing up in St Albans, Victoria, especially as my mother and father were well known in the community. My married name is Lydia Marsh, and I now live at a place called Budgewoi, which is right on the coast north of Sydney and, coincidentally, about 80 kilometres east of a place called St Albans.

Family Origins

My parents were from the town of Lvov, which is now in the Ukraine but had been part of Poland at one stage; my father was Ukrainian and my mother Polish. The family on my father's side must have been reasonably well off, because I was told my grandfather was the highest judge in the Ukraine prior to the war and they had such luxuries as a summer home and a winter home. After my parents married they were separated by the war for a couple of years but were fortunate in reuniting again in Germany. I have an older sister, Christine, who was born in Lvov, while I and and my younger brother Roman were born in Australia.

Settling in St Albans

My parents and sister came to Australia in 1951 and went through the Bonegilla and Mildura migrant camps. I was born in 1952 and then my parents settled in Glendenning Street, St Albans, in 1953.

My father, Alexander Lagan, worked as a clerk with the State Electricity Commission in their accounts section, where he worked most of his life. He was also a teacher at the Ukrainian School at St Albans, hence I spent most Saturdays, amounting to years, learning to read and write the language. Many dances were held in the hall for the local Ukrainian community and, in particular, the Christmas and New Year festivities were very popular. That hall is still there on the corner of Arthur and Alexina streets.

There were more Ukrainian people settled in Ardeer and people would visit each other to and from there. The Ukrainian church was in North Melbourne and it was the proper thing for people to go there for religious services on Sundays. At Christmas time in St Albans a group of Ukrainian people would visit the Ukrainian families in their homes and sing them the old Christmas carols.

Festivities at the St Albans Ukrainian Hall, 1950s.

My Mother's Business

To help support the family my mother established a home business making suits for little boys. She had a space in the garage at home where she did all the cutting and sewing and then sold the suits through her stall at the Victoria Market. She was the only Catholic vendor amongst a group of Jewish tailors and stall holders, but they always treated her as one of their group.

My mother, Irene Lagan, 1969. Each year they gave her Christmas cards to celebrate Christmas, even though they didn't celebrate it themselves. I noticed that some had numbers tattooed on their arms and asked mum about that. She told me about concentration camps but advised me not question them about it.

My mother had the stall at the Victoria Market for years, but when the opportunity arose she opened her first clothes shop, called "Irenes of St Albans", on Main Road West. She later moved to East Esplanade, where she shared her shop with Shirley the florist. Finally, Mum moved to the shop above Hamptons Mens Wear, where she stayed until she retired. Thus she was one of several migrant women in St Albans who had the courage and took the risk to venture into private business rather than accept the predetermined relegation to employment in the cleaning or domestic service categories.

The SSW Store

Not far from her shop in East Esplanade was the wonderful SSW store that catered for everybody in St Albans. At first it was the only place that stocked things like pickled herrings and all the other delicatessen lines that Europeans were hungering for. In the 1950s much of the produce came in bulk quantities in sacks, barrels, or tins, and the grocer had to weigh your items individually. Even biscuits came in those largish

square tins. There was a corner store not far from us in Main Road West where you could buy broken biscuits, which were cheaper. Doesn't that now sound quaint?

Self Bros & Goddard Super Market, East Esplanade

Growing Up

My growing up years when I lived in Glendenning Street were typical of the 1950s in St Albans - no made roads so lots of mud in the winter time, an outside toilet, and milk delivered by horse and cart. We could even see the railway station from our house as basically there were few houses in our neighbourhood and these were surrounded by paddocks. Just across the road from us lived the Jozwik family, so I became friends with Irene and we were companions for many years. We would go exploring the empty fields around us, visit the old quarry site near the station, and go mush-rooming as far away as the ABC transmission tower near Taylors Road.

It was noticeable that the first group of Polish, German, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian immigrants who settled in our street formed a little neighbourhood towards the centre of the street, and later arrivals, like the Maltese and Italians, ended up at either end. As some of the Maltese boys grew a bit older I often saw them exercising their greyhounds by walking them along the streets. Greyhound racing was a popular sport for many young men in St Albans.

My brother also had greyhounds with the ambition of training them to win big at the races. It was a very competitive sport and there was the fear that good dogs would be tampered with to stop them winning, so the night before a big race my brother would sleep near the kennels so no one would interfere with the dogs or try to give them drugs. Usually his dogs didn't win any races and so they ended up as family pets. He is still involved with greyhounds, but these days someone else does the training for him.

Near the Main Road West end of Glendenning Street was the police station, and I think Dr. Frajman's office was on the corner where the Social Security office was later established. Dr. O'Brien's office was in Victoria Crescent and Dr. Rogozinski was the dentist in View Street.

Growing up I felt no different from all the other European children except at school, and only when it came to eating our lunches did we stand out. I was very envious of the Aussie kids for their lunches. How I would have loved a vegemite, peanut butter, or a hundreds-and-thousands sandwich. As my parents had never tasted these types of foods, there was no way their hard-earned money was going to be spent on something that didn't look appetizing to them.

Education

As typical of European families, the older sibling was the interpreter for the family. My sister Christine was the one who took me and my brother to our first day at school and then explained the routine to the family, also regarding all of our sports, etc.

I went to the Sacred Heart Catholic School in St Albans for my primary school years. I have mentioned I come from a Polish-Ukrainian back-ground, and English was our second language, which I acquired through school rather than the home. I don't think I spoke much English at all when I started school though I used to enjoy the singing and remember that students would sometimes sing in the church on occasions such as funerals. I then went to Marian College in Sunshine for my high school days and was there till the end of Form 4. I don't remember too much about my school years there either, except that all the nuns looked like they were over 60 and they were all much too strict. I hated high school.

My teenage years during the 1960s, especially Saturday nights, were spent at the Tin Shed doing barn dances. That was about the only place in St Albans that had some entertainment for young people, so it was popular for that reason.

Working for the Health Department

After high school I got a job with the Health Department in the Commonwealth building in Spring Street, where I worked in data processing for six years. It wasn't the modern computers that we now have. The data was stored on big reel-to-reel tapes which were sent away to be processed.

While I was working I saved my money to buy a car. I was one of the first in our neighbour-hood who had a car and was licenced to drive when I was 18. I was the first person in our family able to drive, even though my sister is 12 years older than me. My first car was a FH Holden, then I got a VW. Having a car was great because I could take friends to places like the driven ins at Laverton and Maribyrnong.

Moving to New South Wales

After leaving the Health Department I decided to be adventurous and got a job in Sydney with the Customs Department; that was in 1973. I met

Ron Marsh in 1974 and we married in 1975. We established our home in Sydney and after about five years bought a "weekender" in Budgewoi. The house is right on the lakes and, when we first went there, there was only one set of lights in the place, that's how secluded it was. When I think of it, we were a bit like my grandparents in the Ukraine, because we had a city home and a country home. Budgewoi is a very beautiful place and we loved it so much that we moved there permanently about 16 years ago so that our twin boys, Mitchell and Nathan, could grow up in the lovely seaside environment. The boys are now aged 22 and both working. They are both golf fanatics and one even represents the district in various golf tournaments.

I now live permanently on the Central Coast of New South Wales. Budgewoi originally was a secluded spot though now it is rapidly expanding. Ron is carpet layer, so he has plenty of work around the district with all the building that is going on.

Lydia and family: (L-R) Mitchell, Ron, Lydia, Nathan.

Postscript

My sister Christine now lives in Keilor, and my brother Roman is at Reservoir. To this day I still have contact with friends that I grew up with, including Irene Jozwik (Lenc) and Vicky Pykalo (Wright), though they also no longer live in St Albans. But I guess you cannot take St Albans away from our memories.

Kind regards to everyone.

Lydia Marsh, 2005.

Ukrainian Hall in St Albans, 2019

Paul Ledney: Primary and Secondary Teacher

My parents, my older sister Anna, and I arrived in Australia in 1951. My parents were born in the Ukraine, while Anna and I were born in Germany. We had been living in one of the displaced persons camps in Germany after the war, as were hundreds of thousands of other people in similar circumstances. My mum and dad were originally from the Ukraine but they were a couple of the smart and lucky people who managed to escape from an area that was taken over by the communists at the end of the war. They escaped to the American-controlled part of Germany, and from there sought to find a new home. They thought Canada was a desirable destination but the opportunity to come to Australia came up and they took that.

We arrived on the SS Protea, a freight ship that had been adapted for transporting people. Men and women were separated on the ship and the young children were accommodated with the women. On deck there were only ropes as guard rails along the sides and mum was scared that Anna or I would go over the edge, but we never did. I learnt to walk on the ship.

From Bonegilla to Girgarre

On arrival in Melbourne we went to the Bonegilla migrant reception centre, from where we were soon sent to Girgarre, about 40 kilometres west of Shepparton. This was such a huge metropolis it had at least 450 people living there. My dad had been allocated to carry out his two-year work commitment at Christiansens, the Scandinavian-based company that now was operating the cheese factory there. This small town became the biggest cheese producer in Victoria and, where cheese was once synonymous with Cheddar, the European influences resulted in the production of a wide variety of speciality cheese that a more cosmopolitan population was seeking.

We lived in an unnamed street locally known as Church Street that was about three kilometres away from the factory. Every day dad would ride his pushbike to work, and that was the common mode of transport. It was whilst we were here that my younger sister was born.

Leadership in Cheese Production

My father became a leading hand at the factory, and part of his job was to make sure the maturing cheeses were turned every 48 hours. He also tested the quality of the cheeses by taking samples with a special auger-like tool. In the fifties that factory was the pace setter for hygiene and had even won awards for their

standards. The factory was meticulous about hygiene and whenever I would visit dad at his work I had to go through a strict hand-washing routine and don a protective gown so as not to introduce any undesirable bacteria. All the workers were dressed in white garments. The cool rooms had regulated temperatures and there were huge vats of milk, 20 metres long, with great combs stirring the milk. Eventually that factory was taken over by Nestle and then even later, with all the international takeovers and rationalisations that have been occurring, the factory was closed down.

Moving to St Albans

When we came to St Albans I was living in Glendenning Street. I don't think mum was too sure about coming here, but dad had bought a block of land for fifty pounds and that was going to be the place for our new home. Our block was like it was in a little village of Poles, Germans and Ukrainians. I hated the place at first because I missed the good times and fun I had with my mates in going swimming, cycling and yabbying. In the country you could go off for three or four hours at a stretch and enjoy yourself and your parents would be confident that you were absolutely safe.

From Catholic to State School

I started at the Sacred Heart Catholic School in Year 5 and was there to Year 8, which was their top class. I left Catholic school after Year 8 and came across to St Albans High School in 1964, starting in the third form. Gerry Osadczuk was one of the tallest guys in the class with whom I had a fight but after that we became the best of friends. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life and consequently was not particularly concerned about academic achievement. This caught up with me a couple of years later when I had to repeat year 11. Mum wasn't happy with me and told me to make up my mind, because the family had moved to Melbourne for better opportunities for the children and she didn't want me to waste that opportunity. I repeated year 11 and was with the group of students who graduated in 1967. In year 12, I was Form Captain, so I had the confidence of other students.

High School Teachers

The St Albans teachers were absolutely sensational as far as I remember. Two particular teachers that stand out for me are Bruce Alcorn and Norm McLeish, both of whom were solid as rocks in my development as a person.

I had Alcorn for History. I admired Alcorn, and he made a statement to me that moulded my life. He was a genuine person who was always calm and composed in his behaviour. He took me aside one day and advised me to consider some changes, which proved to be beneficial for me and I've been grateful for that advice ever since.

Form 6 with Mr Alcorn, 1967. Paul Ledney is third from the left, second row from the back.

McLeish was a hard-working guy and I liked his style of teaching and something clicked for me. I remember in Year 10 he was giving some award for best work in English and the final choice was going to be between Broderick Smith, Ray Haynes and myself. In the end the award was given to Smithie though I couldn't help but think that it was good recognition for me to be there in the top three when at the age of five I couldn't even speak English, whereas the other two were of Anglo background.

Playing Football

I enjoyed playing football and one of my personal highlights was being best on the ground at a game we played on Errington Reserve. As well as taking us for English, McLeish was also a keen sports teacher and was umpiring that match. I played in the school football team that played against Maribyrnong High, whom Stefan Czyz and I agree should have been called the Footscray League Reserves because they had several players from the league level and St Albans didn't. That was in 1965 when we played on the Maribyrnong High School ground. My claim to fame on this occasion was that I kicked the point that was the only score by our side on that day. On one of the few occasion that the ball actually came toward me in the full forward position someone tripped me when I was going for the ball. I was given a free kick and was looking to score our first goal but hit the goalpost. At the end of the match Maribyrnong had scored 36 goals and 41 points and St Albans had scored 1 point, and I had scored that.

I really enjoyed the football and played with the local team and also at teachers college. Unfortunately I experienced problems with the cartilage in the knee and had to have an operation. The surgeon advised me to give up football and skiing, so that was end of my football career.

Taking up Volley Ball

So I took up volley ball instead and ended up playing in the state league in the late '70s. I'd also played some volley ball at school, but when I started training with the new club I was told to forget everything I had been taught at school

because it was all wrong. For some months all I did was train and watch the others play the matches. When I had the chance to be part of the playing team it absolutely engrossed me. After playing numerous games I discovered that volley ball is supposedly the worst sport for stress on the leg joints, but I survived it.

Teacher Training and Work

After High School I enrolled in Teachers College and completed the two-year training course to get my Teachers Certificate, but then the three-year Diploma of Teaching course was introduced, so I did an extra year to qualify for that. It was here that I really developed an interest in art. We did art as a subject at high school but I hadn't been that interested in it while I was there. By the time I finished my teacher training art was my specialty.

My first job was in a brand new art room at the Newport West Primary School, which was officially opened by Lindsay Thompson, the Minister of Education. I really liked working there and was there for about 4 years before moving on to Essendon. At that stage the class performance of teachers was scrutinised by inspectors from the Education Department. They said very positive things about my work and suggested I consider becoming and art advisor within the school system. When the opportunity came up I applied for the position and got it. My job was to promote and support art across all schools, including primary and secondary within the state and the Catholic systems. I even became a representative on the advisory panel looking at the white and green papers on the proposed changes to the education system.

It was in 1979 that I applied for the Bachelor of Education course at Melbourne University. I completed that over four years part time, which gave me the accreditation to work at secondary school level.

Unfortunately these specialist advisor positions with the Education Department were also being 'rationalised' so I took up a position with St Albans Primary School.

Changing Directions

Then I decided I wanted to change what I was doing. I took the package on offer from the Department and left in 1994. I decided to try the courier business, so I bought a one-tonne refrigerated van and started transporting specialist deliveries like blood samples, medical supplies, and perishable goods. After two years of keeping meticulous records I concluded that I was really making a loss and couldn't under-stand how other people survived. It's a pretty competitive field and I couldn't see my prospects improving, so I got out of that line of work.

Returning to Teaching

Some of my school teacher mates who had made their way up to principal level were encouraging me to come back to general teaching because they were looking for staff.

I'm a teacher who left teaching and then went back to teaching. I've known Stefan Czyz a long time, and he's been such a staunch friend that he's also weathered the trials of both my divorces. I'm sure that he'll be there if I ever have a third divorce, but first I have to meet the right woman. You can see I am a resilient person.

Stefan and I went to the same teachers college, the Melbourne Teachers College. After I finished that course I started teaching in the western suburbs, then transferred to northern Victoria, then down to Geelong, and finally came back to the west.

At the age of 28 I went to Melbourne University to complete a Bachelor of Education so I could teach in the secondary school system. They gave me secondary certification, so I was now qualified to teach at primary and secondary levels. Lately I've been doing secondary teaching.

In 1984 I thought I'd take a year off teaching because I had a few problems, so Stefan took time off as well and we'd play golf all year, literally.

Family

I was teaching at Newport when I met Kathy, whom I later married. She was an amazing athlete and joined me when I was playing volley ball. So we became a volley ball family and really enjoyed that activity together. I married a girl younger than me - when I was in Form 6 she was in Grade 6. After we divorced I was on my own for ten years then I met a woman in Ballarat who was even younger than my first wife.

How we met was a bit of a story because that was when I had the courier business with the truck. A friend and I had heard about these dances in Ballarat and thought that would be a way of meeting some single girls. It happened that a job came up to cart some crates of berries to one of the large grocery stores in Ballarat and we thought that was a good opportunity to go to the dance as well. We were dressed to impress in maroon jackets, black pants, and crisp white shirts and bow ties. When we turned up at the supermarket the staff were very surprised to see a couple guys all dressed up wanting to see the manager, and I'm sure they were all wondering what it was all about. The manager invited us into his little office and then we told him we were delivering the berries he'd had on order.

We made a good impression when we got to the dance all dressed up in fine gear, because all the other guys were in casual clothes and we were the only men in more formal attire. The women certainly noticed us, because I later married one of them through meeting her on that night, and she told me we really stood out when we walked through that door.

At the age of 46 I had my first son. He is now 10 years old, and I'm 56 years old.

I am now living in Port Arlington in a house I designed and had built. I'm planning to go to the Ukraine to visit where my parents come from. I want to take my ten-year-old son and show him the country of some of his forebears. He is a gifted child educationally and I am sure he will enjoy the experience. Dad and mum still live in Glendenning Street, though dad's health is not the best.

Finale

Although I'm now retired from teaching in terms of full time work, since 1979 I have still been working in contract positions and casual relief positions. I'd be no good completely retired. Paul McCartney has been quoted as saying: "I'm now 60, and you have not yet seen my best years." I think that is a very good quote, because it sums up exactly how I feel.

Paul Ledney, 2006.

2012 Update

In 2005 Paul moved from Portarlington to his old western stomping grounds and settled in the newer district of Cairnlea, which he discovered as one of the west's success stories because of the lakes and old trees. Paul moved because he wanted a home closer to his work. He also wanted to down-size while still having a back yard for a vegetable garden. He describes himself as the world's greatest exponent of solar power with a rooftop of panels that have made him independent from the power companies. In 2012 Paul's son, Paul Ledney jnr, was dux of year 10 at Ballarat High School, making his father extremely proud.

Father and son working on the garden 2012.

Irene Lenc nee Jozwik: Public Servant

My parents were Anna and Henry Jozwik, from Poland. I am the eldest child, with a younger sister named Janine and a younger brother called Joseph. My parents may have been of Polish background but I was born in Australia, in Wagga Wagga.

My father came to Australia on the Fairsea, which landed in Melbourne in June 1948. He was one of the people sponsored under the IRO group settlement scheme. He must have gone to Bonegilla at first, because I remember my mother talking about it. Our real introduction to Australia was through the migrant hostel in a little town called Uranquinty. It had been an air force base and the buildings were the typical corrugated iron construction. From Uranquinty my parents moved to Benalla, and from there they bought a block of land in Glendenning Street, St Albans. Here they had to build from scratch. This was in 1954, so we came just as the area was starting to grow.

Disembarking at Station Pier, Melbourne

After my father arrived in Australia he was contracted to work for the SEC, where he worked for many years. When we lived in St Albans my father worked at ARC Steel works at Albion, which was close to home. We didn't own a car so dad had to walk and use public transport. Luckily, Glendenning Street was close to the St Albans station and ARC was close to the Albion station, which was a bonus for dad going to and fro from work.

The house in St Albans was built in stages, one room at a time. My first memory was when there were three rooms: a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. My mother Anna was a stay-at-home mum and I remember her cooking on a primus stove, the type that people now use for camping. She cooked for the whole family on this one burner. I don't know how she managed.

Another difficult task was doing the laundry. Mum had to light the copper tub - which was situated outside - and then put the clothes in the tub and bring the water to the boil. A thick long stick - like a baseball bat - was used to poke the clothes down as they rose up while the water boiled. The stick was also used to lift out the hot clothes that were then placed into a tub of cold water to be rinsed.

When more rooms were added to the house mum finally had a laundry and a twin concrete trough was installed. Now mum could do the washing indoors using the tin scrubbing board to rub the tough stains out from the clothes. Eventually the concrete tubs were replaced by stainless steel ones, which are still in the house today. The scrubbing board and copper tub were replaced by a wringer washing machine.

In the early days we used to have an ice cabinet, which was used to keep the food cool. I remember we had ice delivered to the home. The ice was in one BIG block - about 12 inches long and 10 inches wide and thick. Sometimes the block had to be smashed into smaller pieces to fit inside the cupboard; any tiny bits that were on the bench the three of us kids would scoop up and put into our mouths. That was our ice-pole - no flavour, but a treat for us.

The ice cabinet lasted for a year or two when eventually the yellow Astor, the round-shouldered, solid-style fridge arrived. My parents bought it second hand for 25 pounds and were very proud of their purchase. Even the neighbours came to have a look at this modern electrical appliance. This fridge lasted another 20 years before mum decided to replace it with a more up-to-date type. Now the round-shoulder type fridge is coming back into vogue and my oldest daughter, Rebecca, bought one - second hand - in Queensland for her flat, because she liked the style.

Primary School

I went to the old primary school in St. Albans and I used to love the playground equipment, which was made of all metal components in those days.

I remember the crates of small milk bottles that were delivered to the school, sitting out in the sun, and sometimes when we got the milk it was already warm and not very pleasant. We overcame this problem by buying flavoured straws. These were sold by the corner milk bar near the school. You could buy strawberry or chocolate flavoured straws. You put the straw into the milk bottle and the flavour would come through when you sucked up the milk. It was nicer than plain milk.

We also had our milk delivered every morning to our home. Sometimes I would wake up to the clinking of bottles as they rattled in their crates as the horse pulled the wagon. Once awake I would listen to the clip clop of the horse's hooves as he moved and I waited for the milkman to command the horse with either "whoa" to stop or "giddy up" to go. I remember getting out of bed and peeping through the curtains to see this sight. It was still very dark but the street light provided enough shine to see what was happening.

I didn't know any English when I first went to school, but I remember that we were taught through the John and Betty books. We had to read a sentence or a page. I got stuck on some words because I didn't know what they were, so I asked the teacher and she told me. The next day I had to read it again and I had forgotten the words. The teacher said, 'I'm not going to tell you. Ask your mum and dad.' My mum and dad couldn't read English! I was really stressed as I knew I had to find a solution. Finally I decided to go to my neighbour, Mrs Fowler, who lived across the road and asked her what it meant. She told me 'mother and father.' I remembered and learnt those words. So easy now.

Another phrase I quickly learnt was "shut up". Our neighbours on the left side of the house was Irene and John Szczapaniak. They were about 8 and 6 years old and already going to school. I was about 6. There were no fences between the properties so we used to go back and forth to each other's houses and backyards to play. This particular day we must have had a disagreement because I remember us all yelling at each other. Irene and Johnny would yell "you shut up" and my sister Janine and I would reply with "no, you shurup" they responded with "no you shut up" and we would go again "no, you shurup". We couldn't even get those words right but the meaning got through. Mum then called us in for lunch. When we went out to play after lunch we were once again all friends.

Although I was a Catholic I never went to Catholic school. However, I did go to church regularly, once a week. The Catholic school used to hold Saturday lessons for kids from the state school who were going for their First Holy Communion and Confirmation, and I went to those classes. I remember that Father Reiss was the Parish priest for many years before Father O'Reilly took over.

The Neighbourhood

I remember the unmade roads that had gutters with the tall reeds and long grass growing beside them. There were no nature strips, only tall grass about knee high. In summertime the neighbourhood children would play outside, at one of the local paddocks or on the street, playing cricket or tag, and as it got dark we would all play hide and seek. I remember lying down near the gutter to hide from the others. Later on my imagination got away from me and I thought there could have been a snake and all these germs ... but that's what you did as a child.

Another play area for me was the local quarry not far from us opposite the present hotel. The quarry was a very deep hole, but when you are young you don't think about that. There was a fence but it had gaps. I would go to the quarry and loved going through the old rubbish. I used to bring back the coils of old bed springs and strap them to my feet and think I could jump to great heights. I was only small, about seven or eight. My mum would say don't bring any more junk home. The council decided to fill in the hole in the early 'sixties.

At first Sunshine Council wanted to use it as a rubbish dump, but there was opposition to that idea from the local rate payers. Council eventually filled it in with clean fill, and then made a sports reserve.

The Green Gully road was much steeper and more curved than it is today. There was a young man in our street, Alfred Bobek, who had one of those vintage cars. One day his brakes failed going down that Green Gully Road and he was killed. There was quite a few more accidents before the council partly filled in a section of the deep valley to improve the road.

High School

In 1963 I went to St.Albans High School, as it was known then, and it was a co-educational school. That was a real transition from primary school because of the difference in the way the school system worked. You had the one classroom and the one teacher in Grade 6. At high school you had all these different teachers for your various subjects, you had to go from one room to another, and there was a locker rather than a desk for your belongings. My sister Janine started high school a year later and my brother Joe started at St.Albans Technical School, which was a boy's school at that time, in 1966.

Wearing a uniform was quite interesting, because you had no problems in deciding what to wear. You just put on your uniform and went to school. You grabbed your bag and books that were quite heavy and you had to walk. You didn't have cars to ask your mum for a lift, you had to go by yourself.

Occasionally I used to go home for lunch, which meant a good 15 minute brisk walk to get home in Glendenning Street, and then have half an hour for lunch, then another 15 minutes of quick walking to get back to school in time. Most days I brought sandwiches from home. We had our bread delivered everyday. It was Vienna bread, not sliced. Mum made our lunch and we had this continental bread cut thickly while our Australian friends had the nice sliced bread. It's what you can't have that you want. Now I have the choice and I prefer rye or Vienna bread. I hardly ever bought lunch. Money was tight as mum was now a widow. (Dad died in 1964 at the relatively young age of 47.) Once in a while I would buy a buttered roll from the tuck shop. The rolls were fresh; the special part of the roll was the butter. They whipped the butter with milk, I think, and aerated it making the butter very light and easy to spread. It tasted delicious.

School Uniforms

You had to have a lunch pass to get out of the school ground, because prefects stood at the gates checking everyone wanting to leave. It was good to have a pass that showed you had to the authority to leave the grounds; you just showed it and it was like saying 'I can get through'. Another reason the prefects were on the gate was to make sure you had the correct uniform and wore your beret - because a lot of girls didn't want to wear them - otherwise you would get detention. If you were walking down the main street without your beret and a prefect or a teacher driving past saw you they'd actually pull over and yell out, 'Put your beret on!' Berets kept your head warm in the wintertime, but it was annoying that they were so strict about it. Nowadays it's quite different.

We had to have a special uniform for sports, i.e. a tunic and bloomers. We made our sports uniforms in Form 1 as part of our sewing classes. They were made of purple material and you had to buy a coloured, twisted cord - about 1 metre long and it had tassels on both ends and this was used as a belt. The colour of the cord you wore depended on the sport house you belonged to. There were four sport houses: Warratah-red, Wattle-yellow, Jacaranda-purple and Kurrajong-green, all named after Australian flowers.

Sewing and Cookery Classes

In the first year of high school it was compulsory for girls to learn sewing and you made your own cooking outfit as well as your sports uniform. The cooking outfit was an apron and a little hat. In the second year you did cooking. For the third and fourth year you had a choice: either cooking or sewing, which you did for the two years.

Teachers

I remember Mr Shaw as being a fairly strict fellow. I started off the school year by being able to see the board, and then I couldn't see it properly, so I asked my friend next to me could I copy her work to put onto my book. I was so engrossed in exchanging the information that when Mr Shaw slammed the book on my desk I jumped a mile high. I went red as a beetroot because I was really timid. I was in shock and rather upset. He didn't accuse me of cheating, but said that I was distracted, not paying attention to him and that I was disrupting the class. I thought he was picking on me. As it turned out, I soon found out why I couldn't see the board - I was shortsighted and needed glasses. Copying the teacher's notes from the person next to me was my way of getting the work done.

We had Mr Safe as a form teacher and he also taught us typing, which was unusual for a male to be teaching. Nearly everything in those days was gender specific - a woman would do the typing and a man would do the woodwork. To have a man teaching typing was different. I enjoyed typing classes and the girls thought Mr Safe was a good and fair teacher.

Irene Jozwik, on the right in the top row, with classmates and Miss Butler 1965.

Fundraising for Assembly Hall

In 1967, my last year of school, the students were asked and encouraged to raise money for the building of a hall. My fundraising plan was to do gardening. My sister Janine and I went door knocking and offering our services to do the weeding or tidying up the garden as our way of raising money for the school. It was a Saturday afternoon and we door-knocked and walked for what seemed like miles, and finally we got one job. We did about three hours of weeding. I can't remember how much we earned but at the time I thought, "Gee, that's not much for our effort and it was such hard work."

I left school before the completion of the hall so never stepped a foot inside it. (I hope to attend the school's 50th year celebration in 2006 and then have the opportunity to go inside the hall.)

Working for Whittingslow

My very first job was with the Whittingslow Carnival. I must have been fourteen or fifteen. The carnival came to town and my brother, Joe, was excited and interested in the carnival and got friendly with the people who were running the shows. He wanted a job but because he was too young they couldn't give him one. He said, 'All right, I've got an older sister, you should give her the job.' I applied and they asked me could I do arithmetic, that is, adding up and subtracting numbers. I said "yes." They needed someone to look after a stall that had clown heads moving from side to side and 4 or 5 ping pong balls were placed into the mouth of the clown. After all the balls were used I had to add up the total score and if that number was listed on the board the person won the prize. Little children always received a prize; it was a tiny gift that gave them pleasure.

I was on my feet for a long time, no sitting down at this job. Some of the local people were surprised to see me behind a stall, and some people tried to entice me into giving them a prize even if the numbers didn't correspond with the list on the board. What I didn't realise was that the boss had a chap from the carnival checking whether I was being honest or not. Obviously I was, and at the end of the day they paid me really quite well and asked if I'd like more work during the school holidays at the Exhibition Building. So it pays to be honest. That was my very first job. I've never forgotten that nice, exciting carnival atmosphere and experience.

Working for Dr Balabin

I left school at end of 1967 after completing the Leaving Certificate. My first permanent job was with Doctor Balabin and Dr Liszukiewicz, who was better known as Dr Henry because people had trouble saying his difficult surname. Working at the surgery was interesting because they never used appointments. You just had to arrive, present yourself to the front desk, give your name so the files could be retrieved, and then wait your turn.

The surgery had tried an appointment system, but a lot of the migrants didn't understand how that worked. Sometimes people had waited for one-and-a-half hours and they would be getting quite irate because they were waiting their turn and other people who had an appointment would come at 10 o'clock and then be seen almost straight away. The people who were waiting may have been allotted 11 o'clock and they'd say, "why is he going in before me when I've been here all this time?' It caused confusion, so in the end Dr Balabin did away with appointments. It was first come first served; they just had to wait their turn. This is when the waiting became very long 2 to 3 hours, so people learnt and arrived early and waited before the doors were open to be first in line. If there was an emergency these people had to be seen first so patients sometimes had to wait even longer than two hours. People would sometimes say, 'I just need an injection,' so the doctor would slip them in line, but even the five or ten minutes giving that injection would put his schedule further and further behind.

Dr Balabin saw more patients and this was due to the fact that he prescribed "The Pill". The pill was a controversial issue for some people and Dr Henry would not prescribe it for religious reasons, so more patients saw Dr Balabin.

Both doctors did home visits and that used to cause problems too. Both worked very long hours. The morning session would be from 9am and finish after the last patient was seen, sometimes after 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock. Dr Balabin used to live next door to the surgery and would go home for a quick lunch; he was lucky to get a half an hour. Then he'd do the home visits, and depending where it was it could be five to ten minutes driving, or it could be twenty minutes. He'd have to diagnose the situation and that would take another half hour. If he had two home visits that could mean a delay in starting the afternoon session, which began at 3 o'clock and the last person would be seen about 8 o'clock. However he was always running late with his schedule and most evenings would end at 9 pm or later.

I worked four days dayshift and one day afternoon shift, from 3pm to 9pm. At lunchtime I would walk home for lunch, just as I had while I was at school, and Mum would have lunch ready for me. I didn't have a car and was used to walking. I didn't want to stay in the office to have lunch because you would get caught up with the work situation. At the surgery it was always busy and I needed my lunchtime away to cope for the afternoon session.

After two and a half years I felt it was time for a change. My friends were saying how wonderful it was to work in the city, so I decided to do that.

Department of Supply

I started working with the Department of Supply in the city and worked there for about ten years, doing clerical work. It was such a change of pace. Working for the doctor everything was busy busy busy, go go go. When I went to the Department they gave me filing and I'd be finished in half a day, depending on how much there was. They were amazed and asked me to slow down. They said that was a week's work. It was hard to convert to their pace. Now everyone is under pressure to perform, aren't they?

When I joined the public service I came across Helen Czernik who was also working there. We recognised each other from high school, because Helen was a friend of my younger sister Janine. Working together kept us in touch all this time and we became close friends.

Marriage

On the 27th February 1971 I married Vladimir Lenc, who was also from St Albans. We originally met at the YCW dance that the Catholic Church organized. It was held once a month on a Sunday. The dance was in a hall and a live band provided the music. There was strict control at the door entrance, sometimes by Fr O'Reilly. No alcohol or smoking was allowed in the hall. Vlad and I started going out, and after two years of dating we decided to get married. He and I were each twenty years old, which is young nowadays to get married.

Travelling in Europe

Before we had children Vlad and I went to Europe for twelve months holiday. We had been married for about five years and Vlad wanted to go back to Croatia, because that was his place of origin. I'm glad I travelled with somebody who had experienced life in Europe as it made things easier to cope with. It was very much an eye-opener for me. The experience made me aware of different cultures and trying to communicate in a foreign country made me realize the hardship migrants had to cope with coming out to Australia. We bought a combi van in England and then travelled all over Europe. As well as Yugoslavia we went to Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, France, Greece, Turkey, and even Morocco. Eventually we went to Poland, but that was only a three-day pause. It took us a day to get there, we stayed a day, and then it was a day to get back.

I remember Mum, Dad, and other people saying how wonderful Poland was. When I went there I thought it was drab. I went to Krakow and thought it was a dirty old city, but now I realise I didn't appreciate the history. One day was not enough. I also thought "home is where the heart is". My parents came from Poland and, no matter what I thought of it, to them Poland would always hold a special place in their hearts, just as Australia did to me when I was travelling.

The reason we went to Krakow was that when we were camping in Italy we met some Polish people. They were doctors and invited us to come, saying 'whenever you are in Poland, come and visit us.' We had no intention at the time so continued with our travels, but then had a bit of spare time and decided to try Poland. The doctors made us welcome and provided us with accommodation in their apartment. They lived in a one bedroom apartment the parents used the bedroom while their son slept on the couch that was unfolded every evening to make a bed. That was his sleeping quarters. They had a small kitchen and a dining-living room combined. They took us out to a restaurant that evening and we had authentic Polish food. It was great.

When we were in East Germany it was highly tense. The streets were patrolled by military police in uniforms and they carried rifles. The country was under the control of the Communist regime; this was in 1975. We weren't used to seeing police with rifles and found this very intimidating. This experience of witnessing a political, military-controlled country made me

appreciate how good Australia is. There's no place like home.

Current Situation

My first daughter Rebecca was born after our travelling experience and I took twelve months maternity leave from work. When I returned to the Department I stayed for another five years before having my second baby, Kymberly, and then I retired from the public service. That's when we moved to Belgrave.

Vlad loves the hills and the trees, the peace and quiet. When we were looking around for a place to live we chose Belgrave. We moved into the house in January 1983, just before the Ash Wednesday bush fires. We experienced a very stressful day and were very fortunate not to get burnt out.

Over the years Vlad was doing subcontract work while I was a stay-at-home mum. When Kym was in grade 6, I decided to look for a part-time job. I found a position as a receptionist with the local optometrist in Belgrave. It was a job-share situation, my part being three days a week. I stayed for 13 years and have just recently resigned.

Both my daughters went to university. Rebecca, the oldest, graduated as Bachelor of Science and is now employed by the Gold Coast Council in Queensland as a Microbiological Science Officer, testing water and doing lab work.

The younger one, Kym, has a double degree and is a secondary school teacher. She teaches physical education and science. She's going very well and enjoying her career.

Janine, my sister, married and had two children, Christopher and Nicole Rosbergen, and moved to Ballarat to live.

My father-in-law, Ivan Lenc, still lives in St Albans as does my brother and his wife, Sue, and their two children, Jason and Justin Jozwik. I visit them regularly. My good friend Elizabeth Tucker nee Mleko from high school also lives in the area.

St Albans still holds many good childhood memories for me, that's why I'm interested in its history.

Irene & Vladimir Lenc, 2005

Norbert Walter Loeffler: Senior Lecturer, Art Historian

Norbert Loeffler's family arrived in 1955 from Germany. In 1952 an assisted immigration agreement was made with the Federal Republic of Germany that was effective for five years. By December 1957 there were 37,000 Germans who arrived in Australia under this agreement. In 1986 there were 1,066 people in St Albans who were born in Germany (2.1% of the population) and 932 persons said they spoke German at home.

Prefects 1969. Norbert Loeffler (second last row, second from left) and other prefects, 1969.

Loeffler attended St Albans High School in the sixties but left at the end of Form 4 when he was aged 16. In an unconventional scenario for the times, he returned eight years later in 1969 at the age of 24 to finish his secondary education. His extra curricular activities included being part of the school magazine staff and he was also President of the SRC office bearers, which that year included other notables such as Noel Scheurer and Colin Baulch.

In 1969 he was politically active with the Equality in Education Campaign that was organised by Uldis Ozolins from Melbourne

University. Norbert and a few other students would meet in the main shopping centre of St Albans on Saturday mornings handing out pamphlets and speaking to people in the street about the importance of equality in education. He came back to the school in 1971 as a member of the school's Advisory Council, so his commitment to the school had been extended beyond the norm.

Norbert's association with Lorna Cameron and the Youth Club started in the fifties through the St Albans East Primary School (her son Les was in the same class) and continued in the sixties at the High School and the Youth Club, by way of many different activities: sport, dance classes, discussions, etc.

As well as being the school librarian in the early sixties, Lorna was the voluntary coordinator at the youth club and thus was able to mediate between school life and community activities. Lorna remembers that Norbert started various protest actions about the dreadful state of education in the Western Suburbs.

The following extract is from an application Norbert made to get into a Master's Degree in Art History program with George Washington University, USA, which was accepted.

Letter of Application

I was born in Germany in 1944. My family immigrated to Australia in 1955. I am still literate in German. Because of need, I left St Albans High School at the end of fourth form, when sixteen years old. For the next eight years, I worked first as a bank employee, then as a retail department manager and staff-training officer, and finally – for experience – as a roustabout. Privately, in this period I continued my education and I became involved in the Melbourne art world; art had been my original career choice. In 1969 I resumed my formal education, finished high school, and gained a Federal Government scholarship, awarded to the top 15% of students, which financed my course at Melbourne University. My major fields of study were Literature and Arts History. I have completed three years of a four years combined honours degree—giving me a B.A. The latter part of the degree I abandoned because of my dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching and course content.

In addition to my studies, I was the Vice-President of the Students Representative Council for one year and Education Officer for two years. This involved me in the major political issues of the early 1970s and the promotion of reform at all levels of education: I instigated campaigns to highlight inequalities in education; organised, directed and taught at university summer school for disadvantaged secondary students; ran conferences; organised community education action committees; and effected changes in university education. And, during my second year at university, I worked part-time as an education research worker for the state association of school councils. After university, I still did one year of teacher training for a Diploma of Education.

Because of my education knowledge and teaching experience, I became part of a small group of students exempted from conventional teacher training; instead we were placed in 'disadvantaged' schools as teacher aides and did community welfare work. I also was given permission to teach (part-time) a final year high school art class, and I was seconded for most of the year by the Australian Council of Educational Research to work in the education section of the National Poverty Inquiry, then under way; my job was to supervise a group of six student researchers and to interview and write profiles of school drop-outs.

When this year finished, I was immediately hired by the Prahran College of Advanced Education, one of Australia's leading art schools, as an art history lecturer. Over the last three years, I have evolved new courses and almost alone taught the (approximately) 150 students in our painting, sculpture, printmaking, drawing and photography departments.

In a typical week I gave two lectures: for all first year students, an introduction to modern art; and for second year students a mixed group of lectures on influential twentieth century artists and movements, and some revisionist lectures on traditional artists/periods, and some lectures on areas of special interest, such as Oriental Art, Primitivism, etc. All first and second-year students receive separate tutorials from me on the history, theory and practice of their respective mediums. As well, I take some seminars with third-year students.

To evolve a curriculum as full and varied as this has taken three years. I have twice been overseas to study art works and to collect books and slides: in the winter of 1975–6 for two months to the USA and again in 1976–7 for one month to the USA and another to Europe. I am applying for enrollment at the George Washington University, and if accepted I want to research the sources of American Art since the 1940s: the people, the landscape, the culture, and the intellectual context from which the art sprang. More generally, I want to closely acquaint myself with the art in galleries and the recent developments in contemporary art. Other

attractions are that G.W. has an art school and a museum studies course.

In my time in the USA, I want to look at the workings of art schools. And my own college is presently establishing Australia's first museum studies course. I have been assured that my job will be held over until I return. A further reason for going to Washington is that several good friends live there. Some of these are graduate students at G.W. Up to this time I have not published anything, although recently I wrote two short articles for John Davis (one of my referees) for him to use as an introduction to his work at the Indian Triennial and the Venice Biennial.

Norbert Loeffler, 1978.

Career in Art History and Theory

Norbert Loeffler has been a recognised art historian, lecturer and critic since the 1980s. In 1972 Loeffler was coordinating a summer school at Melbourne University through the Secondary Students Union, an activity that even achieved some publicity in The Age. He taught art history at Prahran College and was a casual academic at RMIT. He joined the National Gallery Art School which became the Victorian College of the Arts and is now part of the Melbourne University, where Loeffler was employed as a senior lecturer in art history and theory and has worked there for many years. As an art critic art he contributed to the debate about modern art, such as the controversy of Bill Henson's photography and the morality of exhibiting a dying man as an art object.

He has travelled extensively in pursuit of art appreciation and has led his visual arts students from the Victorian College of the Arts and members of the public to explore, for example, contemporary and classic art in Communist China through Beijing, Shanghai and Singapore. His international interests have included developments and trends in German painting and art since the nation's reunification, about which he lectured for the Goethe Institute.

In 2014 he was awarded the Distinguished Teacher Award for his work on promoting and supporting the arts.

Nick Szwed & Norbert Loeffler at St Albans Tin Shed's 50th Annivarsary 2004.

Lana Malakunas nee Switlana Bohudski: Teacher and Public Servant

My family originates from Poland and I was born overseas in September 1943. My parents were Peter and Tamara Skorobohatch - Bohudski. My mother was from Rovno, which is between Kiev and Lvov. When I was born the town was part of Poland and was known as Rowno, then it was part of the Ukraine and known as Rovno, and now it's still part of the Ukraine but known as Rivne. It was the biggest town in the region during the war and when the Germans invaded many people tried to escape as earlier as possible, which ultimately was a smart move because thousands of the Jewish population were subsequently massacred. When we left Rowno we went along the Czech border to Germany. My aunt and her son had gone to Brno and then to Prague where they lived until she died. My cousin died last year.

We left Rowno in early 1944 so I was only 4 months old when we went west along the border until we got to Germany and ended up in the British zone which had a number of displaced persons camps. From there we went to Naples in transit out to Australia. My father left first in 1948 and we stayed. I think once you reached the age of 45 you were no longer eligible for sponsorship by the Australian government. At that time my father was 44 so he had to move quickly and he landed in Sydney in May 1948. After a short stay at the Bathurst migrant camp in New South Wales, father was sent as a logger to the camp at the timber mill at Swifts Creek in East Gippsland.

The rest of my family came to Australia on the Stuart Heintzelman in April 1949 and were first taken to Bonegilla and then sent to Swifts Creek, where my father, Peter Bohudski, worked as a timber worker. Swifts Creek was a pretty small place about 25 kilometres south east of Omeo - it started as a gold-mining town before developing its dairy and timber milling industry.

We came out a year later and missed the Bonegilla migrant camp because father was already working and was able to arrange accommodation for us at Brookfield which was out in the mountains up near Omeo. The only way to get there was by logging truck. It was an old deserted house in a clearing. I remember there being kangaroos and wallabies and kookaburras that would dive for snakes and take them right up and drop them and pick them up again and swish them around. I was fascinated by it all. I loved the animals. We stayed about 6 months there and then father was able to get a

disused miner's cottage about 3 kilometres out of Swifts Creek and we lived there until we left for St Albans in 1952.

When my grandmother and I joined father I learnt what work could achieve. As a child I was proud of the tall man who worked hard and came home at the end of the day after working in the bush. He laughed and played with me and let me run with the chickens and helped plant the garden so we could grow food. He was a man who went rabitting and fishing in the Tambo River. A man who bought me a bicycle and taught me how to ride. A man who never forgot to bring me a packet of Juicy Fruit and PK chewing gum at the end of a day's work. He encouraged me in every way possible to go to school, to read to write, to ride my Malvern Star bike, to run and play. We talked and we laughed and from the stories he told me about his own life I learnt about between right and wrong and between justice and injustice. I also learnt that if you work hard despite problems you could do a lot with your life. And so it goes.

Attending School

In 1951 we moved to St Albans and were living in Oberon Avenue. Once we came to Melbourne there was a lot of factory work available. There was the AGI – Australian Glass Industries – which was at Spotswood and a lot of people worked there. Kinnears Ropes was at Ballarat Road Footscray and the carpet mills in Tottenham. There was the CSR Sugar Refinery in Yarraville. The SEC in Newport took a lot of people and my father worked there until the separation and then he went to work at the ammunitions factory in Maribyrnong.

Father worked at the State Electricity Commission in Newport – he would take the Melbourne train at St Albans and then change at Footscray for the Williamstown line to Newport and after a ten-minute walk would arrive at work. He worked morning, afternoon and night shifts.

My mother always worked, as did father. Grandmother stayed at home and did the shopping, the cleaning, the cooking, and tried to keep up with everyone's shift work. George worked three shifts. I must have learnt about the value of work very early in life. It was in the DP camps of northern Germany that I came to understand that work often meant the difference between life and death. Even as a child I realised that those lucky enough to work were more readily able to put food on the table for their families. They were the ones able to obtain scant medicine or warm clothes for winter from the black market. They were the ones who could barter for small luxuries like soap and cigarettes and maybe some vodka. It was the promise of work that drew father to Australia. The assisted passage migration scheme to boost defence and development which was introduced by the Chifley government after World War Two meant refuge from repatriation and likely death in the Soviet Union under Stalin not only for himself but his family.

My mother's first job was at the ordnance factory in Deer Park. She worked in the detonators section, which was a very dangerous occupation. From there she went to the wool carpet factory in Tottenham, and from there until she retired at 75 – an age that she never admitted because she was frightened the government might catch up with her – but she was 15 years younger according to the official records. She'd worked as a domestic at RSL House in St Kilda and at the International House of Students in Royal Parade. She also worked at Civil Aviation as a tea lady. The called her Thelma because she didn't like her name Tamara. She got called Tammie as well.

I started at St Albans Primary School in July 1951 and finished Grade 6 in 1955. The games the kids played in those days included knucklebones, which originally were real bones that were salvaged from the Sunday lamb roasts. For the girls there was drops which was a card game. Of course we loved to play skippy and hopscotch. The boys sometimes played gambling games of penny or halfpenny against the post. You would throw your penny against the post and if it landed on someone else's penny you would take it. The boys loved marbles and would have their favourite cats' eyes and tom bowlers.

I remember going to the Self Brothers' small general store in East Esplanade with my father when I was about nine. A tall fair-haired man was behind the counter which had an array of glass jars full of lollies – there were boxes of sherbert bombs, liquorish allsorts, musk sticks, sweet hearts, chocolate bars and my very favourite peppermint crisps and polly waffles.

In 1956 I was in the first intake of students for the new St Albans High School, and I was fortunate enough to win a Keilor scholarship during that year. Because the school was still being built, we spent the first 12 months travelling to Sunshine where classes were held in the Sunshine Presbyterian Hall adjoining the park. We moved to the school's current location in 1957.

Bruce Alcorn was special as a teacher. He used to live in Sunshine near the railway line and we could glimpse sight of his house whenever we went past on the train. He taught at Albion Primary School before he started at St Albans High in 1956 and later was at Williamstown High School. I saw him recently at a class reunion and was most impressed that he still remembered my name. We were delighted to see each other after so many years and he took me by the hand and said, "Switlana, you were a good girl."

I remember Paul and Ludmila Pavlov

because they lived locally as well as teaching at the school. They were ethnic Russians from Latvia and tried to maintain a happy life as they had in Europe. There was a lot of laughter and there was a lot of song. They played cards, they smoked, and they drank. They had a lovely time perhaps at a time when a lot of the other people were not as positive in their thinking. There were a lot of sad and depressed people. The Pavlovs tried to rise above their circumstances and hence both Mr and Mrs Pavlov ended up teaching despite having been assigned to factory work when they first arrived. Mrs Pavlov was a seamstress and certainly was very good at sewing and she taught needlecraft. Paul taught mathematics. I met Paul again when I was a student at Melbourne University studying Russian and so was he and we happened to be in the same class. He'd been to Moscow University, as far as I know, and Paul Coverley our lecturer of linguistics had also studied at Moscow, but Coverley was from Scotland. We used to have some very lively discussions about the nuances of language. One would say that this is the way it used to be and the other would say this is the way it is now. Pavlov studied in Moscow pre war but Coverley studied there during Soviet times and the language had changed – the intonation, the pace, the usage. It was nice meeting Mr Pavlov on a professional level rather than as student and teacher.

My final year at St Albans High was when I was in Form 5 in 1960, because that was the highest class at the school at the time. Apart from the educational side of school, I also served as a Prefect, was on the Sports Committee, was the Girls House Captain for Kurrajong, played as Captain of the girls senior basketball team, and won the 75 yard and 100 yard sprints in the athletics. So it was a pretty full year.

Switlana Bohudski's class, Form 1a, 1956.

I have much empathy and gratitude for our teachers in the fifties. They were an amazing group of people. They accepted us for all our many differences, always encouraged and guided us in all endeavours and extended us beyond anything we ever thought possible. They seemed to understand our pain and confusion and gave us hope in an uncertain world. I can only hope that I've been able to give my students a little of what they gave me.

Matriculation Year

Matriculation was not offered to our intake because there were not enough students who wanted to do it. The decision was made that if we wanted to go on to Matric we would have to go to other schools.

So, of the 150+ initial students, six of us only went on to do matriculation in 1961 - Jeff Barlow, Tony Venes, Margaret Smedley, Doreen Gist and myself. I'm sure there was another person, but I don't remember who it was. Margaret and Doreen were from Albion, and Jeff, Tony and I from St Albans. Jeff, Margaret, Doreen, and I did our matriculation at Sunshine High School.

Captain S Bohudski (front right) with E Hermann, I Kryzius, V Kepalas, V Viti, K Grabowski, V Sryter, S Antonczyk, and S Wazny.

Fellow Students

Tony Venes was not in the 1956 intake. He came to us in 1960 as a mature age student. I think he was all of 24 years of age. The boys in those days all had to wear not only a school uniform but a cap. A little in awe of this new young man (definitely not a boy) we all wondered whether he also would wear a cap - he did. We were very impressed. Tony went to University High School to do his Matric and then on to Monash University, where he studied medicine and graduated as a doctor.

Bella Ajayoglu was also in the 1956 intake, but she had gone on to University High School in 1960. From there I believe she went on to Melbourne University, from where she also graduated as a doctor. She devoted her life to paedeatrics working from Western General and her own clinic in Footscray.

Vanda Viti was a close friend at school and she enjoyed sports and drama. She also became a primary school teacher and taught with the education department for 40 years. She married Pepi Bognar and they retired to their property in Daylesford.

I'm afraid I've lost track of both Margaret and Doreen.

Julian Castagna was in the 1957 intake and his family had migrated from Italy. Julian joined the school's drama group, started working for the ABC and became involved in the commercial film industry both in Britain and in Australia. Currently he runs a very successful boutique winery out of Beechworth.

Leslie Thurgood, who also was in the year of 1956, lived in Walmer Avenue. His family came to St Albans from England in the early 1950s and his parents, Dorothy and Nevil Thurgood, were involved in the local theatre groups, such as the St Albans Little Theatre. Les joined the navy and served many years with them. Les and his father were living at Mt Macedon for some years before they were burnt out in the Ash Wednesday bushfires.

After High School

Then myself? I graduated as a teacher having completed my B.A. at Melbourne University and teaching methodology at Melbourne Teachers College. I worked in schools in the western and northern suburbs during which time I completed my Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare.

The condition of our teaching studentships was that we could be sent to teach anywhere in Victoria. If you gained reasonable marks you had a better chance of staying close to the city. I didn't really mind, though I would have loved to have gone to the western district, perhaps Geelong or Portland, but I had made friends with girls who were from the country – Albury, Gippsland – and they all wanted to stay in the city. So, as girls do, before we nominated our preferences we made a decision together to apply for the city and got the eastern suburbs where the girls aspired to be. One went to Lee Street, the other was in Camberwell and I got Surrey Hills.

I married Henri Malakunas, who is of Lithuanian background and his family came to Melbourne in 1949 under the IRO Resettlement Scheme; his father had trained as a teacher but the IRO tested and classified him as an apprentice plumber. Henri and I eventually settled on Mount Macedon in a lovely 1860's old cottage that has its own name of "Haversham". It suited our lifestyle.

Teaching Career

I won't forget the Surrey Hills experience. Come the end of the first year there I was asked to take a composite grade 3 and 4 class for the following year. I accepted that but I always preferred to teach older children and would have loved grade 6. This particular morning I was sitting in the staff room waiting for classes to start and the deputy principal walked in. He said, "Lana, just a word, please. We had a school council meeting last night and decided to ask you to take grade 6 instead of the composite class."

I was delighted and said so. He got a cup of coffee and was on the point of going out and I asked him, "Would you mind telling me why that decision was made?" He said, "It's the first time that we're going to have a composite class in the school and the parents haven't really accepted the idea. So we discussed it and decided that they would accept the composite class more readily if the teacher had an Anglo-Saxon name." My surname was Skorobohatch-Bohudski although I went under Bohudski. For the rest of the day I mulled over what I'd been told.

At the end of the day I went straight to the Education Department and asked for a transfer. I knew that if you were primary-school trained you could teach at the junior levels of high school, so I asked if that could be arranged for me. The officer said "Yes, of course. What school would you like to go to?" I was offered Footscray High School, which I was happy to accept, and that's how I changed from primary to secondary school. I then went back to university and completed my degree part time. It's what I wanted to do and the union was also pushing for all secondary teachers to be fully university qualified. After 5 years of part-time study I got my degree. I spent 12 years at Footscray High and they were wonderful years and I still have friends and wonderful memories from that time.

I'd been at Footscray for about 5 years and at the end of the year there was a staff dinner. I happened to be sitting next to the deputy principal at the time. He said, "Lana I've got to tell you a story of when you first came to the school. I happened to be out at yard duty at lunch time. The bell went and everyone went inside. I saw the principal standing outside the office with a piece of paper in his hand. I could see that he was really perturbed and asked him

what was wrong. The principal looked up and said 'We've got another one' and showed the slip of paper with the name 'Switlana Skorobohatch-Bohudski'." In those days there was a terrible teacher shortage and there were staff employed who were not fully trained and staff from Europe who had difficulty with the English language. When they saw my name they feared the worst. So they were really pleased to discover that I could speak the language and had trained in Melbourne.

I spent my life in education and feel privileged to have had the benefit of the many experiences. I also completed a post graduate in student welfare and worked as a pupil welfare coordinator at Paisley, Laverton and Sunbury. The post graduate study was at the Hawthorn Institute of Education which did a lot of teacher training.

After teaching for a number of years the last 12 years of my employment with the Department of Education was with the Staffing Unit in Employee Relations - another 12 great years. As you can see, education has been, and continues to be, my life. In fact, in 2003 I received a 35 year service award from the Department.

Most recently I completed the Advanced TESOL Certificate through the Global TESOL College. As a result of this I am now teaching in China ... and loving it - smiling, eager, highly responsive students - hard to beat - and 46 in a class!

What prompted me to teach in China? It all started a long time ago. In 1949 my future husband and I had migrated from Europe to Australia with out families. Now for the first time we were returning to countries from which our families had fled. I felt excited but at the same time a little apprehensive. The memories and stories I'd grown up on had not slipped away as they had become part of my consciousness. It was now 1998 and we were flying to Frankfurt in Germany and then planned to travel through Eastern Europe, which was a fairytale world of intriguing people and culture: castles, citadels, ancient universities graced the ever-changing landscape. Gemstones glistened in shop windows, vendors in parks and cobblestone streets enticed passersby with amber of liquid hues and baskets of fiery red garments. I

t was a world of music and concerts of spontaneous song. In this world cathedral bells chimed and puppeteers and buskers entertained bright-eyed children. It was also as if by magic that I kept seeing leaflets and posters with one message. No matter where went it was on shop windows and old city walls and even church gates. We'd turn a corner and they'd be there. The paper was different, the colour was different and the writing was different, but they always had the same message: "Teachers Of English Wanted."

I thought it was something I might do when I retired and Henri encouraged me. The idea returned a few years later when we ventured into Asia for our first time. It seemed that teachers of English were wanted in Vietnam, too. I saw the same message in Ho Chi Min city, Hanoi, Hong Kong and other Asian towns. At the end of 2003 after more than 40 years' service I said goodbye to the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

I decided to continue studying and did my TESL qualifications – Teaching English as a Second Language. I completed that on-line over the year. This was just in time to get a phone call from friends who were going back to teach in China. It was a wonderful opportunity though I had to reconcile the thought of going to teach in a political system that was diametrically opposed to my own beliefs and which my parents had rejected. The uncertainties swept in. I did my research over the internet and everything I read was very interesting and appealing. It was something useful, purposeful, interesting, an opportunity to experience a different culture. It was an agonizing decision because I would be going by myself, but Henri encouraged me to take the challenge. I decided to do it and was privileged to have that experience.

Lana and Henri Malakunas (left) with Jutta and Nick Szwed (front) enjoying lunch.

Teaching in China

I'm teaching at Taizhou Normal College. It is a teachers college such as Melbourne, Burwood, Coburg and Toorak Teachers Colleges were in the '50s, '60s and '70s. My classes are well over 40 but the students are a delight to teach. They are very eager to learn and very responsive. They are always smiling and I find myself doing the same. I teach in double periods but the time seems to fly.

Taizhou is in Jiangsu province, PR China. It is about 4 hours North West of Shanghai on the Yangtze River. Since arriving here two weeks ago, we've experienced two typhoons. Last weekend the typhoon was so fierce that along the eastern coast 14 people were killed

and thousands had to be evacuated. Being further inland we only got sideswiped, but still the wind was so ferocious that I tossed and turned all night and woke up with a headache and sore ears in the morning. The one good thing about typhoons though is that they blow away the incredibly dense pollution which is always there. Yesterday we had an almost blue sky, but as I look out of my window, I once again see a pall of grey over the city. The horizon is about a kilometre away.

Exploring Jiangsu Province

If you saw China in the seventies, you certainly would see many, many changes now. I don't have a benchmark for comparison apart from my study of history, but people seem to be content and very proud of the country's achievements of the last twenty years - particularly the last ten.

I'll tell you a little bit about what has been happening here so it might give you and idea of just how much life has changed in China.

Visiting Shanghai

October 1st was China's National Day followed by a week's holiday, so Dianne and Graham, (the two friends with whom I am here) and I, decided to go to Shanghai where we had an interesting few days. We found Shanghai to be another BIG city with very obvious contrasts of "modernisation" and life as it was, and continues to be in the streets. Our hotel was in an old part of town, very comfortable and clean and only about a 10 minute taxi ride to anywhere we wanted to go. So go we went - to The Bund which is like South Bank but magnified tenfold and probably more, under the river through the Tourist Tunnel with flashing, coloured lights, and then up to the Pearl of the Orient Tower, cheek to jowl with the billion other tourists. The view would have been spectacular had it not been for - yes, you've guessed it - a murky grey pall of pollution.

Every big city has its "road" and Shanghai is no exception. A stroll down Nanjing Road went forever. Street vendors and small side street eateries were quite at home amongst boutiques and huge shopping complexes. There was a buzz as the millions who had come to Shanghai for the "Golden Week" of shopping snapped up one bargain after another. Even I bought a vest and a casual jacket with which I am very happy.

We visited the Old City and the Yuyuan Gardens. It was fascinating to see the architecture of yore and the many quaint stalls and shops which offered everything from silks, art work and pearls to every souvenir imaginable. There were drink stalls, tea houses, and exclusive restaurants - where I might say, we had lunch of shrimp, crab and lemon chicken - very yum!

A trip to what we think is the former French Concession area with lovely gardens and tree lined streets, led to a visit to Sun Yet Sen's house (which was shut for restoration) and the house of Jou En Lai where we were shown over the property by a very pleasant and knowledgeable university student. It was interesting to listen to the history and admire a beautiful 1930's property.

Just around the corner from the hotel was a 700 year old temple of Confucius. It had been almost totally destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but after 10 years of painstaking work by volunteers it was finally opened to the public in 1999. Once again we were given a guided tour by a university student who took great pride in telling us about the history of the temple and the current charitable work being done by the volunteers who look after the property. There were some wonderful artifacts on display - items which had been squirreled away during the revolution and then donated to the temple when times were safer.

We explored the streets around the hotel and saw life as it really is for the many who have not caught up with China's spiralling economy - the street stalls, the tiny shops with their goods spilling onto the footpaths, the families and friends relaxing and eating in laneways alleyways and doorways. We dodged between bikes, scooters and cars as they mercilessly tooted their horns and vied for what little space there was.

We were amused by the vendors and crowds that gathered to watch a potential transaction with a 'Westerner' taking place. There was genuine interest, curiosity, and many smiles and laughter. It was interesting to see that they were all quietly concerned that we weren't short changed. We smiled to see people in pyjamas strolling, shopping, working. It has been explained that because life has become so much better in the last ten years, people are starting to wear more relaxed clothing as they themselves are so much happier and more relaxed. An interesting thought!

A magic moment in time was hearing jazz drifting on the late afternoon air as a soloist played a trumpet, and looking up, I saw him etched in the window of a far off apartment building that had seen better times.

The National Games are being held at the moment in Nanjing which is only 2.5 hours away, but all the basketball matches are being played here at the Taizhou stadium. I have been lucky to receive an invitation to a couple of the matches and am really looking forward to going. Henri used to play basketball and I spent many years watching or scoring matches at Albert Park, so have a good knowledge of the game and really enjoy it.

Visiting Yangzhou

Yesterday we had our first organised trip. A group of us went to Yangzhou which is west of

where we are, on the way to Nanjing. It is bigger and "more prosperous" than Taizhou. It has 7 million people as distinct from 5 million in Taizhou. The streets are tree lined whereas in Taizhou there seems to be a lot of building going on and there isn't as much greenery.

It was a glorious day. We visited Heyuan Garden, one of the most famous private gardens in China. The grand residence was built around a central pond which has numerous covered outdoor flyover walkways linking the various parts of the building to the central pond pavilion. The water in the pond sparkled, children eagerly looked for fish that were apricot and gold in colour, and families quietly sipped green tea in the pavilion.

Lunch was served "in a private room upstairs" of a restaurant in down town Yangzhou. We enjoyed many tasty dainty morsels and then spent the afternoon at Slender Lake which was really lovely. The lake wound its way in a narrow L shape on which bobbed pleasure boats in brilliant colours. They floated under arched bridges and touched the shore from time to time. It was fringed by willow trees and red lilies, and adjoining it were flower filled meadows which swept into the distance as far as the eye could see. As I said, it was a glorious day.

Lana Malakunas, 2005

School reunion: Andy Kratsis, Jeff Barlow, Les Thurgood, Switlana Bohudski, 2016.

Alex Pliaskin: Tafe Teacher, Associate Lecturer

My parents were Russians but were living in China when I was born. My mother's father was a railway guard on the Sino-Siberian railway based in China and my father's father was a high ranking government official in Tsarist Russia. As best as I can establish, he was the mayor of the fairly large city of Chita in Siberia. He disappeared off the face of the earth when the Bolsheviks marched into Siberia and so my paternal grandmother gathered up their three children who were my father Igor, his brother Ollie and a sister, Jenny and fled to China. After the Second World War Ollie returned to Russia and Jenny married an American sailor and moved to the United States of America.

My father was a plumber but he had no trade qualifications as we know them. At the time, in China, you developed your trade skills through practice and anyone who wanted to work as tradesman called himself such and went looking for work. If you were good at what you did then you got the work and if you weren't you didn't get the work. It was as simple as that.

Living in Manchuria

I was born on 1 November 1949 in Harbin and this was the capital city of the province of Manchuria in Northern China. I believe that Russia had acted as a colonial power in the region but it subsequently lost its influence. When Mao Tse-Tung came to power in China in the late 1940s the Europeans who were living in China were not looked on very highly. Life must have been very tough and starvation was very much a part of life in the region in which we lived. Even though I can't remember the times I still hold some attitudes towards food and other things that in today's society might be considered to be odd and quaint. I try not to waste anything and especially food.

I remember my parents describing the Japanese occupation during the Second World War as a horrific time for everybody concerned. The Japanese seemed to delight in being exceptionally cruel. After Mao Tse-Tung came to power the notion was that Europeans were not very welcome. When I was born I wasn't even issued with a Chinese Birth Certificate. Instead, my parents had to go to the Soviet consulate in Shanghai to have my birth recorded and it was there that I was issued with a Soviet Birth Certificate. Things in China were pretty hairy and scary and it was really incumbent on the Europeans to get out. My parents really had a range of choices about where to go. They could have gone to Canada, Brazil or the United

States but they came to Australia because my mother's sister was living here.

My father really wanted to go back to Russia, but he was precluded from doing so because during their occupation the Japanese recruited the eldest son of every family into the army. My father was the eldest son in his family but because he was married with children his brother Ollie was recruited instead. Ollie ultimately became a radio operator in the Japanese army.

Because of that, going back to Russia wasn't a realistic option for dad as he would have been regarded as being hostile. Ollie did go back to the Soviet Union and was allowed to stay, but he was restricted to living in a defined geographic region that he was not allowed to leave because of his association with the Japanese Army. My father would have been placed in a similar situation. Migrating elsewhere was the only other choice as to stay in China was not a realistic option. The story I heard was that very shortly after we left Manchuria some Europeans were executed for no good reason apart from the fact they were Europeans.

Migrating to Australia

Because we were not regarded as true refugees we were not offered the luxury of a 20 pound assisted passage to Australia so in 1954 my father had to borrow about 800 pounds from the World Council of Churches to get the family over here. We can put that into perspective by realising that an average worker in those days would have been grossing about 7 pounds per week. So the loan was a substantial amount. With the prospect of arriving here less than penniless my father sought to offset some of this debt by smuggling some gold for a friend who wanted to get it out of China. If he had been caught then God knows what would have happened to us. Given our circumstances it was a risk that he had to take.

We came to Australia and settled into the little hamlet called Ardeer as this was where my aunt lived. We all somehow survived in a small shack at the back of her place. There were six of us. Mum and dad with the three boys and dad's mother as well. Grandmother was difficult to live with as she was always revelling in past glories and often let mum know how fortunate mum was to be married into "status".

When we came to Australia my father didn't work as a plumber because he didn't have formal qualifications. Unfortunately, my father was not a go-getter. He had the opportunity to sit for certain Board of Works tests in order to qualify but he never bothered. He worked for a number of smaller businesses and ultimately got a job at the Olympic Tyre and Rubber Company in West Footscray. He worked there for over 25 years and was quite proud of the longevity of his service and the watch that the company had given him as a reward for this.

My mother initially worked in one of the Smorgan family businesses in Brooklyn and this is where many migrants found work. Very shortly after we arrived my sister Tatiana was born and in 1958 my other sister Svetlana was born. After my grandmother died mum had to stay home to look after the girls and it was left to my father to provide the money for the family. He worked as a labourer with The Olympic Tyre and Rubber Company and also did after hours and weekend jobs as a plumber. Because a lot of people were coming to the area at the time there was much building activity and dad was working seven days a week most times. It was good for the finances but not very good for the family relationships.

One of the consequences of the men working long hours was that this tended to isolate the wives at home looking after the children. That sometimes led to family breakdowns or illness. My mother ended up in a psychiatric unit several times because she couldn't cope with the whole situation. That stress on families was probably a bit more prevalent than we care to admit. We tend to glamorise the times but it really was a struggle.

I can't say that I ever had any type of meaningful relationship with my father. I had a father but he was never there as he was always working. I grew up reasonably insecure due to a number of reasons. I didn't seem to have as much as other kids and when one is young this seems to be important. We were a large family and my parents were trying to build a house. This took a lot of money and energy and dad had to pay back this phenomenal debt to the Council of Churches. I often felt deprived, unsure, and awkward.

Religion and Communism

My family were not particularly religious although they did believe in God. The Russian Orthodox Church was located in Collingwood and it was difficult for them to get there. Also, dad was working on most Sundays. They seemed to go to church on the major religious days like Easter and Christmas and for weddings and funerals. Many of Russian people who came out of China seemed to be more attached to religion than my parents were including my aunt who went to church every week. But she only had her husband and her son to look after and didn't have the commitments that my parents did and so she had time for religion. My parents had nobody here to help them so, by and large, they were always busy and didn't have the time.

The Russians who came later weren't really interested in religion and they didn't seem to have the sense of community that the earlier migrants did. The Russians that came out initially, in the late 1940s and early 1950s didn't come out from Russia per se. They came from

places like China and Central Europe. They preserved their Russian culture, whereas the Russians who came out later were affected by the communist philosophy. My notion is that the people who came out later were not as hard working as the first group because their work ethic was very much stilted and stunted by the communist experience. Under communism they were able to get away with doing nothing because they were mollycoddled by the state.

Though the ideals of the communist system sound terrific, the practice seems to have a negative effect on initiative. No matter how good you were you weren't adequately rewarded. It seemed that the only thing you were really rewarded for was being part of the system and not causing ripples.

Primary School

Initially I went to school at Albion State School, which was not far from the Albion Railway Station. I have only fleeting memories of that: it was a mixed bag of kids from all over the world. There was a fair proportion of Anglo kids at the school because Albion was a fairly established suburb that had an attachment to the Massey Ferguson Harvester Works, which was a really big enterprise at that point of time. The Braybrook Housing Commission flats were not far away and there were a lot of railway houses as well. There was still a substantial migrant component amongst the kids, but I couldn't say what percentage.

We used to go swimming in the Kororoit Creek just north of the Forest Street bridge. There were two bridges there with one for trains and the other for vehicular traffic. Kids used to play near both of them and this which was dangerous even allowing for the fact that traffic was sparse in those days. The worst incident was when a fellow student was hit by a train and killed. That swimming hole had been used as the local swimming pool and you could still feel the concrete base. Diving to the bottom became a challenge when I discovered that there were a lot of pennies and halfpennies on the bottom. We also went swimming at the back of the ICI factory at Deer Park and thinking back it was not a good thing to do given the amount of chemicals might have been discharged there.

I was a rebellious kid. Many times I was at school only on two days a week because I was doing what I felt like doing. I would often go to the City with other kids and we'd watch a film and get back to Albion at the time when we would be coming home from school. I remember that the film The Mardi Gras with Pat Boone was very popular and I saw that quite a few times with different kids because that's what they wanted to watch.

It is really amazing that I got through school at all because in those days if they didn't think you were doing well then they'd fail you. They did the opposite with me. When I was in third grade the school didn't have enough students to form an individual third grade and they didn't have enough pupils for an individual fourth grade. They put us all together in the one classroom. When it came to move onto the next year they moved us all into fifth grade. I jumped from Grade 3 to Grade 5. Consequently, I was always very young for whatever class I was in. This was also the case at High School and I lacked that bit of maturity as I progressed through my schooling. I also lacked confidence and felt awkward. I was probably insecure. For these and other reasons school was sometimes a fairly uncomfortable if not painful experience for me.

I think that the feelings of awkwardness started at my arrival in Australia. My given name is Alexei but when I got off the ship from China the immigration officials decided to use the name Alexis. On all my official documents I was Alexis. The only Alexis around at the time was Alexis Smith, the female actor, so I felt a bit awkward about that. Today, Alexis would be a name to treasure. How the times change. I was also the only kid around who was born in Asia.

High School

I came to St Albans High School in 1961 because I thought that my eldest brother Victor was going to be there. However, because the school did not have a Matriculation class in that year my brother left and went to Sunshine High School. However, my cousin, Slavko Borowski, went to St Albans High School at the time but he was no help as he had other things on his mind.

Memories of the early years are a bit hazy. St Albans would have been classified as semi-rural area, but in many respects it was a lot more rural than urban when we started at the school. I do remember that my truancy and other unsocial behaviour continued unabated. Sending letters home about my attitudes wasn't successful so Mr Torpey sent Mr Pavlov to speak with my mother about my behaviour because he was Russian. Pavlov said to mum that he was ashamed that I was Russian. However, I had decided not to stick around listening to that conversation and shot through. Apart from the truancy, the school wasn't happy with me because of my general attitude. I was cheeky to the teachers and broke many rules.

Each morning a bus would drive around to pick up the students who lived in Sunshine, Albion, Ardeer and Deer Park and ferry us to St Albans High School. You either bought a return ticket for the day or a single ticket in which case you would buy another one coming back. I often tried buying the one-way ticket and tried to sneak on without paying on the way home. Occasionally they'd chuck me off and I'd have to walk home because I'd spent all my money. It was a nightmare for the school prefect on the

bus because we used to smoke and carry on. Poor mild mannered George Listopad was a somewhat withdrawn chap and he had his time cut out trying to control our smoking and loutish behaviour.

Friendships

One of my earliest friends at St Albans High School was Misha Dejanovic. He eventually became a Booking Clerk at the Victorian Railways but his marriage fell apart and he turned to drink and is now a recluse. Waldo Malinowski was a good friend but I did the wrong thing by him and we fell apart. His mother remarried and the family moved away from the area. I admired people like Vova Karol because of his charm with the girls.

Marin Gunew was an interesting character. He and I used to get around together a little bit. Marin belonged to a family full of intellectuals and was always full of ideas of what the world should be like. Unfortunately, the world was not ready for his idealism but he remains the same right up to this day. He is a fifty-eight year old hippie. Tony Van Ree and I used to get on well and we are still good friends. Peter Ramholdt, Ernie Stiegler and I did a few things together in 1966 and 1967. We all lived in Ardeer and this held us together until we left school and we went our separate ways.

Anton van Ree, Joachim Simovic, Alex Pliaskin
Joe Engert, John Hemiak.

Teachers

I thought that Ian Smith was not as bad as some people made him out to be. He seemed pretty good to me. I have images of poor Mrs Sturesteps trying to cope and all of us idiots making life difficult for her. Now that I'm in the education system I look back at how we treated some of our teachers and feel extremely sad about it.

I have fond memories of Ivan Matthews as he was a really decent human being. At one time Swavec Dawidowicz and I skipped class to play table tennis at his place. Ivan Matthews fronted up unexpectedly and started playing table tennis with us. After a couple of games he said he'd have to go back to school because he'd told Mr Torpey, the Principal, he had left to check up on some kids who had snuck off from school. He was very good-humoured about it. In fact, most of the teachers were good people trying to do their jobs. I think that Torpey was really an extremely soft person even though he had this veneer about him of being really tough. Matthews confirmed this one time in our private discussions.

I remember David Worland looking so tall and awesome when he was standing on the platform at our sport assemblies. And those big brown shoes! He was teaching micro economics at The Footscray Institute of Technology when I was studying there in 1969 and is now a Professor of Management at Victoria University. I bump into him from time to time and hold him in high regard. He retains a veneer of aloofness about himself but that impression he conveys is not really him.

The behaviour of some staff members would be frowned upon today. We had a male teacher lunching in a back office with small groups of female students. We also had another male teacher supervising boys having showers after sessions of sport. At the time I suppose that we were all quite naive and didn't think much of it. I must stress, however, that I did not hear of any actual physical contact arising from these situations.

I have fond memories of Joan Butler. She taught me Australian History at St Albans High School. I vividly remember her lending me a textbook and opening it up to discover that she had written her name in it. I learned that her Christian name was Joan. I felt priveleged in those days of formality. More recently, it was great to catch up with her at the reunions. She was a decent human being. I will always cherish her memory.

Rebellion and Consequences

I was rebellious at High School. I refused to wear a school uniform and wore a blue suit with a multi-coloured tie instead. Mr Torpey just didn't know how to cope with me so he just left me alone. He ignored me even though I was doing things for which some other kids would be hauled over the coals. I really did do a lot of naughty things. In fact I ended up in Turana Boys Home over the summer of 1964-1965 as I was deemed to be in need of care and protection. It was like a holiday home initially and for the first two or three weeks I really enjoyed it. They gave you good food and they gave you good clothing. This part was tremendous. After a while I realised that I couldn't just leave and I found this disturbing.

They initially put me in a section called Classifications where they assess your behaviour and the risk factors involved. From there I was then put into The Gables which was an open place where you really could walk out at any time. However, if you did this you'd end up

in a place something higher up in the food chain. At the complex they had a place called Poplar House which was the equivalent of Pentridge but for juveniles. There were some kids in the place who were uncontrollable.

I got out of Turana in January 1965 and promptly went on with my education and did Leaving and then Matriculation at St Albans High School. I was never a good student. I always had the nous to do well but I could never apply myself. I was distracted too easily because I wanted to do other things. When I think of the lost opportunities in life … what could've been, what should've been and what might have been. I had to do Matriculation over two years as I failed in 1966 and just managed to scrape through in 1967.

Mr Alcorn with Form 6, 1967. Alex Pliaskin is in the back row third from the right.

Escapades

There are many amusing anecdotes that I could mention in relation to St Albans High School. It was considered to be very naughty to have lunch down the street. Mrs Johns ran the school tuck shop well and when I think back the fare was really pretty good. But who could resist the lure of greasy chips and potato cakes? One of the local milk bar proprietors allowed us to eat lunch in her storeroom and smoke there. This came to a sudden halt when she walked in on two of our students in an extremely compromising position.

I remember the times that we got together at the Sunshine Swimming Pool. They were fun times. At the time, the cross-country races that we were forced to endure just seemed so hard. How much easier it would have been if we had a more positive attitude at the time. I remember that Misha Dejanovic used to excel at this sport. He didn't whinge about it but just got on with the job.

Social Outings

In 1965 and 1966 Leo Suszko used to hire a bus and get us to put in 15 bob or whatever it happened to be and we'd go on a bus trip on a Sunday. We'd bring our picnic gear and food and might go to Anglesea in the summer or Lake Mountain in the winter or some picnic place at other times. Places that we normally wouldn't get to. In the main our parents didn't have motor cars or our parents were too busy on the weekends to take us on picnics. So for 15 bob or a pound it was a good outing. I remember people like Gert Noetzel, Lily and Nellie Preslicki and Elisabeth Redl as people who came on these outings. I already had an extensive collection of 45-rpm records and we used to play these on a portable record player even when in motion on the bus. Mr Clancy, a teacher whose first name escapes me, would bring his guitar and we would sing folk songs.

We'd pay Leo the money and he'd arrange for the bus. He often used some guys who ran a cartage business lugging furniture around during the week. On the weekends they'd line up a set of seats on either side of the van and they'd take us to Lake Mountain or Daylesford or whatever. We'd have a good time for the day and come back and it was great. I have fond memories of that. A lot of romances blossomed on the buses coming back. When Leon left I took on that task and hired real buses from George Sita, who was just starting his Firefly Coaches business with a guy called Frank Bono. Eventually that business split up and George went on to set up Sita Bus Lines which is now a huge business. George lived in Deer Park and unlike many people who moved away when they became wealthy he stayed in Deer Park. He remained true to his roots. Frank Bono died in the Philippines when he was stabbed while defending his girlfriend. Bono's retained the Firefly Coaches name and the business still exists. Sita expanded into other areas and his family now run a large business empire. And to think that both people started by driving us kids to and from school on Barnes's buses.

Looking for Work

When I left high school the emphasis was on getting an office job because dad worked in a factory and the last thing he wanted was for his son to work as a process worker in a factory or a labourer digging ditches. Many of our parents were of the view if you had an office job you'd achieved something. If you became a doctor or an engineer then that was really good. My father was quite willing to support me through university but entry into tertiary education was quite competitive and I didn't make it.

Our parents were not able to be good role models but this needs to be placed into context. We were growing up in a new country with a new language and requiring a skill set that was usually not available at home. In fact there were few Australian or Anglo role models available within our limited family and social circles for us to follow. I suspect that is partly why many of us ended up in the education because teaching was the most readily observed role model in many of our lives. What teenagers aspired to become and their parents only dreamed of was to be an engineer or a doctor or some other

professional. Nevertheless many success stories did emerge. St Albans High School produced their share of lawyers (Boris Anin), dentists (Slawko Muc), doctors (Peter Bevz) and academics (Marilyn Hewlett). We even produced the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in the first Bracks Government in Alex Andrianopoulos.

Getting into tertiary education wasn't the only issue. It was also how you were going to support yourself during that time which had to be considered. This is where teaching and the studentship arrangement was an attractive option because it provided the financial support. In fact, some students who had already obtained their Matriculation Certificate decided to repeat the year in an endeavour to improve their marks and become eligible for a Commonwealth

Scholarship.

I applied for a teaching studentship but went into the interview with a fairly cavalier attitude. I didn't care whether I got it or not. With this attitude I wasn't offered one.

I then applied for jobs with the Bank of New South Wales, the Commonwealth Public Service and the State Electricity Commission of Victoria.

I was successful in being selected for all three jobs. Back in 1967 Matriculation was a pretty good qualification and not many students completed High School. I decided to go to the SEC because they were going to pay me $34.30 per week and this was more than anyone else was offering. On 23 January 1968 I walked into the SEC Head Office in William Street and was told I was going to be working in Fishermans Bend the next day. I had no idea where that was and I thought that they were sending me to the bush. There were lots of things I didn't know or understand because my parents had led a very insular life within the migrant community. I found out later that Fishermans Bend was another name for Port Melbourne and it was no longer a problem.

Working for the SEC

I was employed in a great big junkyard called the SEC Disposals Depot which held the organisation's surplus goods. Our job was to dispose of these to the best advantage of the SEC. We sold everything ranging from the Chairman's old Bentley to scrap aluminium and waste oil. For an eighteen-year-old to walk into this was quite an adventure. Like most government organisations of the time the SEC had a very strong drinking culture, and unfortunately I fell into this quite well. I developed a drinking problem that stultified me for a number of years.

At the end of the same year of 1968 I was involved in an extremely serious car accident. I ended up in Prince Henry's Hospital, and for a while, it was touch and go as to whether I would survive. I will be forever grateful to Mr J Kendall Francis, an honorary surgeon at the hospital, as it was his skills that saved me. I recovered but was set back a long way because I had some quite horrific injuries and I carried these for quite a few years. I will always be grateful to Marin Gunew who came to see me on a daily basis during the lengthy time that I was in hospital. I do not remember too many other people I went to high school with coming in to see me and I was extremely disappointed with a lot of people. Another visitor was Jutta Szwed (nee Heymig) who brought me in a little green elf that I still have today. Liz Schwartz later came later on to see me at home. A well-meaning doctor prescribed me some Valium to help me over this fairly traumatic period of my life and I became addicted to Benztropines. That was a bit scary but we sauntered on through life.

Tertiary Education

I fell into the accounting almost by accident. The SEC encouraged their employees to upgrade their skills by going part time to university or to technical college. They wanted me to do some study but wanted me to do a sub-professional course. I decided to study for a qualification at a professional level. I began a Diploma of Business Studies which was a three year full-time course leading to membership of the Australian Society of Accountants. The course was conducted at the Footscray Technical College which became the Footscray Institute of Technology and is now the Footscray Park campus of Victoria University. I stumbled through that somehow and I thought that tertiary education was far easier than high school education. I coped well and graduated.

After completing that course I was a qualified accountant but because of my drinking and pill popping never got very far in that field within the organisation. A lot of promotional opportunities were put in my path but I was never able to take advantage of them. Ultimately my situation became obvious to the powers that be and I went to see the SEC doctor. He suggested I go and read electricity meters for a year while I got myself in order. I did that but enjoyed the job to such an extent that I kept doing it for the next twenty years. It was a good job and they kept paying me at the office rate so I was quite happy.

I really enjoyed my first try at tertiary education so I kept studying and got a B.A. in Politics and Sociology from the Caulfield campus of Monash University. I also started an Information Systems degree which I completed after leaving the SEC.

Retirement and Work

During the 1990s I saw the rationalisation of the power industry. I call it the homogenisation, pasteurisation, bastardisation, and privatisation of the industry. Ultimately, I became a victim of that process when my job was contracted out to

an outside body that ultimately went broke.

The old SEC was an organisation that looked after its people. It forced me to plough 6.5% of my salary into Superannuation. If it hadn't forced me to do this I wouldn't have done it. It also put in another 13% out of its own funds. At times this contribution reached 18%. When I left the organisation in 1997 they gave me a golden handshake that left me financially secure for life.

Family Life

In the early 1970s I met Elvira Kulesza who was also from Ardeer. We married in 1972 and came to live in St Albans in 1973 and we had four sons. Alex, Simon, Michael, and Gregory are now all adult and independent. At least to the extent that kids can be.

As the kids were growing up I became involved with local groups as part of the kids upbringing. I was part of kindergarten committees, school committees and the cubs and scouts or whatever the children became interested in. I joined the junior football scene and even became a goal umpire with the Footscray District League. Later, my wife joined the St Albans Bowls Club in Kings Park. I joined as a volunteer and am now the Public Relations Officer assisting with the recruitment of members and sponsors. I am interested in meeting people and this involvement extended my contacts in the neighbourhood.

Though they sometimes test my tolerance it's beautiful to have grandchildren. I have three granddaughters and the scary bit is that the oldest one is already fourteen. I can see myself becoming a great grandfather eventually and this is scary. I would like to mentor my granddaughters a little bit better than I did my sons. Unfortunately, when my sons were growing up I was on the grog and medication and perhaps I didn't do as good a job as I could've. But I did the best I could.

Interest in Music

My interest in music started in the late 1950s and I've followed popular music ever since. When we were having social dances at the school during the 1960s I was the one who was in Mr Torpey's office playing the music over the loudspeaker system. Even here the nostalgia kick was already starting to kick in because as I was playing a Big Bopper record one of the teachers rushed in wanting to know who had that record.

We also had socials at the St Albans Hall in East Esplanade. One of the students, Peter Manic, played with a band that performed at one of the dances. Broderick Smith was a rock/blues enthusiast and seemed to be always carrying a harmonica around with him at school. He played what I think was his first gig at one of the school socials. Broderick ended up making a career out of music as a vocalist and also as a songwriter. I don't think his songs were ever very successful on the pop charts because they were probably a bit too sophisticated and not commercial enough for pop followers. I think that "Way Out West" is his best tune.

I mainly collected popular music of the 1950s and 1960s and now have an extensive collection. During the 1980s and 1990s I broadcast music programs from radio stations 3APL in Bacchus Marsh and 3RIM in Melton. I also ran a mobile disco during this time and did gigs at places like the Deer Park Hotel and the St Albans and Deer Park Football Clubs. In 1989 I began attending rock'n'roll revival dances. I got friendly with Ian Allen who was a key player at these dances. Ian now has an Order of Australia for his services to music. At times the dances would have overseas artists like Del Shannon and Buddy Knox appearing. I would sometimes go back stage and meet them. Recently I saw Betty McQuade of Midnight Bus fame perform and she was fantastic. At the one time it was great to see someone in her late sixties acting like a kid but at the same time it looked ridiculous. In a few months time I will be going to see Johnny Preston of Running Bear fame perform.

Political Activities

I've been an active member of the ALP for twenty-three years and have worked as an electorate officer for three local politicians. In 2002 I was the Campaign Manager for Andre Haermayer who was then the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and managed to secure 78% of the two-party preferred vote for him. I was proud of this. Politics is very much an industry of opportunity. Alex Andrianopoulos is a local boy who got that opportunity when he was appointed as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly after the first Bracks government was elected. Alex was respected and well regarded on both sides of the house because you could rely on his word. Alex ended up retiring from politics gracefully when his time as Speaker expired.

I hold a number of significant positions within the hierarchy of the Australian Labor Party. However, I am seriously thinking of filtering out of the scene as it is probably time for a younger person to take over. There are other things I want to do and amongst these is keeping physically fit and maintaining a healthy mental state as long as possible.

Joining the Freemasons

I became involved with the Freemasons through Joachim Simovic who also went to St Albans High School. He now calls himself John. He married a girl called Lily who I think is of Germanic background. John worked for the Department of Social Security for a long time and after taking a redundancy package went to work for the Commonwealth Bank. He kept

inviting me to social functions that the Masons were having. The Freemasons is a boy scouts style organisation for middle-aged and older men. It really belongs in another era but it has kept going because it really is a worthwhile community service organisation. It doesn't get the kudos it deserves from the general community. For example, the people who found Jaydon Leskie's body were from the Freemason's Task Force. It seems that every time a disaster occurs the Freemasons come in and do their bit.

John Simovic eventually asked me to join the organisation. As a working class migrant boy I really didn't have any idea about them and I don't know where John was recruited into it. After a while I joined and have now been a Freemason for about 10 years.

Working at VUT

I thought I'd retired in 1999 but two jobs found me. I found myself working for a local politician and I was offered a job as a sessional academic at Victoria University teaching information systems. It was quite comical how I got that job because I ended up simultaneously studying and teaching in the same degree. I now teach information technology, accounting and taxation law at TAFE and Higher Education level.

Victoria University has gone through a fair bit of change. It was originally established to serve the needs of the students of the western and northern suburbs of Melbourne. But then it tried to centralise its operations and consequently many of the "high value" courses ended up moving to the more centrally located campuses. With a new Vice Chancellor, Liz Harmon, at the helm there is a move to return to its decentralised focus. I'm happy that some of the business studies course is now back in St Albans.

At Victoria University I have some significant responsibilities in the subjects in which I teach. With my superannuation there really is no necessity for me to work at all. I teach because I really love doing what I'm doing and feel that I can get across to the students. I feel as if I am doing something worthwhile. I can still hear the words of Ivan Matthews from 40 years ago when he said that "teaching is a no bull profession". That inspires me. Having spent 31 years of my life in industry doing a range of things I try and bring that and my life experience into my teaching. I always look forward to the challenge of being involved in different subjects and this has happened to me in the current semester.

I've had a number of articles published and this has been quite thrilling. As well, some of my work has been presented at international conferences on information technology. Victoria University wants me to undertake research at the PhD level but I don't really want to. I look upon myself predominantly as a teacher and not as a researcher.

Concluding Remarks

When I think of how our parents had to juggle the finances and put up with us I'm really grateful for the sacrifices they made. I can't bear to shift across the other side of town but they came from across the other side of the world into a hostile environment. But then again, many of them didn't have many other options. I know my parents certainly didn't. I suppose the people from some parts of Europe might have had the option of living in subsistence conditions. I am happy to have experienced the benefits of a migrant working class upbringing coupled with a good education. A good proportion of us grew up to be decent citizens even though there was a lot of rocky road along the way. Many of us became professionals or businessmen. Others became tradesmen and even if we didn't have that we mostly grew up as decent people. And this, I think, is the major criterion of successful resettlement.

The late 1950s and early 1960s seemed a more idyllic time. Perhaps I am being nostalgic but it seemed to be a simpler life. People were more content and, by and large, they were more self-reliant and had a more positive attitude to life and its opportunities. I think the attitudes of St Albans people have become more pessimistic over recent years. I don't think there is as much hope and optimism as there was thirty to forty years ago.

I've tried to keep myself fit by attending gym three or four times a week and also walk whenever I can. I have overcome my addiction problems and try to follow a healthy eating regime; however, I am hardly ever successful on that last bit. However, I do feel that the best is yet to come. As long as I'm able to I will keep doing what I'm doing. What's a bit scary is that I remember my father when he was substantially younger than I am at the moment and I thought he was really old then. Ron Barassi recently turned 70 and his ambition is to live to 100. I think that's a really good goal to aim for and I might adopt that for myself. Thanks Ron.

Alex Pliaskin, 2006

Stella Pulo: Alien Of Extraordinary Ability, Actor, Writer, Businesswoman

Stella Cherie Pulo's family migrated from Malta. Pulo's mother, Yvonne, arrived in Melbourne from Gzira with her father when she was 11 years old and years later met her future husband, George Pulo, who was originally from Paola but who had lived in London before emigrating to Australia. Yvonne and George established their home in Kings Road, St Albans, and raised two children, Stella and Michael. Stella soon experienced the 'wog' label phenomenon and stopped speaking Maltese, but later found that teachers were understanding and challenging of racist attitudes.

Stella went to St Albans High School during the 1970s (she was in Form 4B in 1971). She discovered a flair for acting which she developed further by enrolling in the drama department at Melbourne University. She completed a Bachelor of Education course in Creative Arts in 1978 - one could assume that, as for many of her era, training as a teacher was a good way of obtaining access to university education.

She also trained with voice and drama coaches to extend her abilities. These initiatives enabled her to develop a career in acting, singing and writing.

Her professional acting career started in Melbourne in the eighties where she performed in shows at La Mama, a livewire theatrical venue in Carlton that was based on the New York off-off-Broadway venue of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club. Some of her earliest works were based on themes of racism, isolation and exclusion.

In 1984 she toured Victorian schools with her one-woman show "Migrants" and was astonished at the fear of migrants shown by audiences. One of her earlier performances was in "Crazed!?" at the Comedy Cafe, Fitzroy. She tackled racism through shows such as "Stuff We Like" (1988) and "Wadda Ya Doin' Here Anyway?" (1987) which drew on her experience of immigration and settlement within the Maltese community.

The latter was published as an illustrated edition by the Victorian Association for Drama in Education. The play was also used with high school children to promote discussion "about the position of migrants in our community and our expectations of migrants. It highlighted the ease with which people are able to jump to unfounded and unjustified conclusions and fall into the trap of using blanket stereotypes."

One of her later shows "Every Night Something Happens" toured internationally.

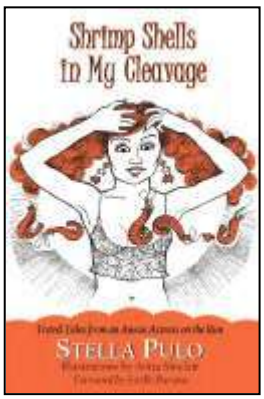
She became a member of Melbourne Writers Theatre and the Fellowship of Australian Writers. Her articles appeared in the Women's Weekly and the Age where her column would report on New York theatre and the comic happenings in and around New York.

The New York antecedents of La Mama must have been magical because in 1990 Pulo was in the United States performing one-woman shows in off-Broadway theatres. In May 1993 she became the first Australia to be accepted as a lifetime member of The Actors Studio in New York, which is an exclusive theatre workshop for professional actors, directors and playwrights.

During the nineties she combined her teaching expertise with overseas travel. In 1993-1995 she was in Japan teaching English as a second language.

In 1995-1997 she was back in Australia working as a consultant for drama and theatre studies with the Victorian Education Department. She returned to New York in 1997 and was granted Permanent Residency in USA as an "Alien of Extraordinary Ability". She acquired US Citizenship in 2004.

One of her overseas accomplishments was performing at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe "Every Night Something Awful" written and performed by Stella Pulo. She has appeared in various television show, including the quirky and popular "Flight of the Concords".

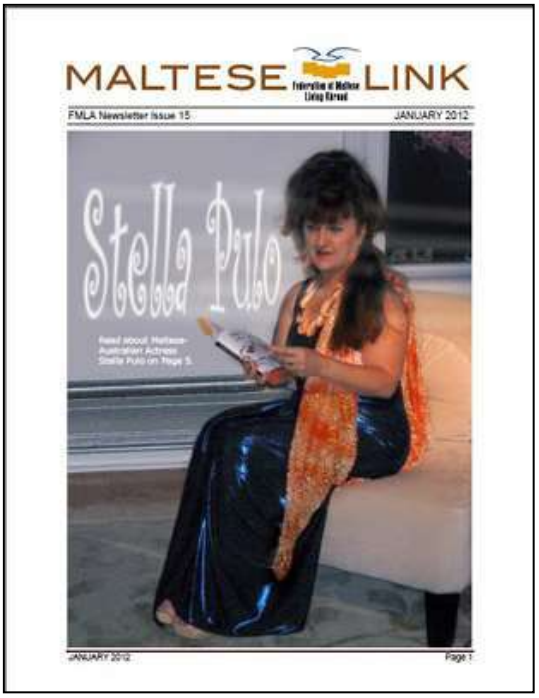


In 2011 Pulo wrote "Shrimp Shells in My Cleavage: Travel Tales from an Aussie Actress on the Run." Not only was it popular for her followers but it was also staged as a performance at the New York School of Visual Arts. Her "commercial" work has included working with Jerry Seinfeld in the advertising genre. In 2012 she was featured on the front page of the "Maltese Link" for the Federation of Maltese Living Abroad. Pulo says she has been to Malta several times since and has taught at and performed in drama classes at the University of Malta.

Her latest article in The Age was on 9 January 2014: "Snow place like Home in New York". She lives in mid-town Manhattan.

And in conclusion, Pulo wrote: “In Malta the the people are like my Maltese family in Australia: generous, helpful, warm and and friendly. But although Malta is where my blood comes from, I didn't feel like I had come home in any way. I had arrived in Malta on a boat that rocked all the way from Naples, but as I quickly learned, there is is no rocking the boat once I got there. For me, Malta was an excursion in tolerance, compassion, a series of lonely moments and revelations, and finally an understanding and acceptance of my family roots and some of the things that make me, me.”

“To me, Malta will always be a small place with a big heart.”



Information compiled 2015.

Joseph Ribarow: Social Worker, Historian

We arrived in Australia in November 1949 at Station Pier in Melbourne. From here we were taken by train to the Bonegilla migrant reception centre, though I have no memory of the place itself as I was only twenty months old and people only stayed there a few weeks under normal circumstances. Bonegilla was the main reception and training centre in Victoria for the government-sponsored immigrants, and many were taken there immediately on arrival before being transferred to other centres in the state. We ended up in Watsonia.

Mum was Aniela Siuda, who was from the small village of Wola Kopcowa in Poland. Dad was Zyva Ribarov from Vrsac, in the south-eastern part of Vojvodina, Yugoslavia. They met and married in a displaced persons camp in Germany, just after the war. My sister and I were born in Germany: Helen in 1946 and myself in 1948. We came to Australia via a refugee camp in Italy, where the family had been accepted by the Australian immigration officials as part of the post-war refugee intake.

Hostel Life

All the men got two-year work contracts when they arrived. This arrangement was to recompense the government for the cost of transport to Australia and the initial accommodation. The work was mostly labouring jobs: factories, foundries, farmwork. Of course people had to pay for their board and accommodation while living at the hostel, so it wasn't easy accumulating savings for your own place.

Mum worked for a while at the Austin hospital when we were still at Watsonia. Migrant women used to work there as cleaners, domestics, and kitchen hands. It would have been relatively close to Watsonia because of the connecting railway line.

My first memories are of the Watsonia migrant hostel, which was a former army barracks made of corrugated iron. From what I remember of the place, the conditions were very spartan and not conducive to communal living.

Occasionally arguments would flare between neighbours at the hostel. Some of the family areas in the buildings were only separated by blankets, so none of it was sound proofed and lack of privacy was something people had to put up with it. This division of crowded living space with flimsy partitions was the same arrangement as in some of the displaced person camps in Europe. I presume the difference here was people's sense of hope and the more

confident anticipation of eventual progress into their own facilities.

Helen told me that Dad got really annoyed one day when he was working shift work because one of the neighbours was making a lot of noise and he couldn't get to sleep. He went round to tell her off and came back with a black eye because the woman's husband had thumped him.

Helen also told me that some women would get even with each other when they did the washing in big copper kettles in the laundry. They would puncture the bottom of the copper so that the water would drip out onto the fire.

It's no wonder that people left as soon as they were able to save enough money to find better accommodation. That's why St Albans was popular as a starting point. You could put a deposit on a bungalow and move into your own space. It may have been basic, but it was your own place where you could live without interference.

Watsonia Migrant Hostel: Joseph and Helena in front row on the the left.

Coming to St Albans

We came to St Albans in 1951 with very few possessions. Our end of Henry Street was mainly bare paddocks with no significant geographic features. Our new home, or perhaps new room is a better term, was all of 12 by 8 foot in unlined weatherboard, a bare wooden floor and a corrugated tin roof. That was home for the four of us.

I think the area had been used as grazing land. At the end of our street there were still paddocks with fieldstone fences topped with wire. Sunshine Avenue further away was an old road of bluestone blocks rumoured to have been built by convict labour, but local historians say it was built in the depression of the 1930s by unemployed men under the government's Sustenance Work scheme. The surrounding land was still used for grazing, mainly some sheep as I recall. I also remember some crops growing in the fields near Green Gully.

We were one family of about three thousand migrants who settled in St Albans between 1952 and 1954, a huge increase to an area which had a population of a few hundred until the 1930s, and under nine hundred in 1950.

Our home site was one of several that had recently been sold to other European migrants. Water was not yet connected to our site, but the neighbour two blocks away had a tap in the front yard and we would fill our bucket from there. At the time there was no electricity at all in the street. It's your typical "we did it rough and tough" story that people have heard before, and we weren't the only ones experiencing it.

We had a kerosene lamp for light and a single-burner kerosene-fired Primus stove for cooking. Mum used that simple kerosene stove for years, well into the 1960s.

The roads were just dirt tracks and the open drains were interesting biological breeding pools in the summer time and opportunities for miniature boat races and other water sports when it rained.

There was no sewerage, just a typical outhouse that was often built by the home owner. Unknowingly we had already joined the race for the great Aussie challenge of the idiosyncratic dunny. In fact it wasn't till the 1970s that the sewerage system was connected to our part of the municipality.

Neighbours

In our first year there were about eight families in our little "village". Next door on the west we had a Ukrainian couple, Josef and and Maria Kiezyk, and their young son, also Josef. Next to them a Polish man with a German wife, Mr and Mrs Melnik. They had no children with them and it wasn't till many years later that the Mrs Melnik was able to bring her daughter out from Germany. To the east of us was another Polish and German couple, Mr and Mrs Hoffman, with a young daughter, Veronica. Past them was a Russian couple, Mr and Mrs Dalinkiewicz, with two sons, Nick and Victor, and a daughter, Zina. Behind us all there were three occupied properties: a Yugoslav man married to a German women, then the Kasjans, a Ukrainian couple with two boys, John and Michael, and a girl, Stefania. There was a Lithuanian family at the end. This little hamlet of houses remained unchanged in the early fifties, but eventually other houses started to be built around us.

Veronica, the girl next door, was an outgoing type whose company we enjoyed. Helen and I would go to her place and listen to the radio or play with swap cards. Listening to the radio was exciting and I couldn't wait for the hour the children's programs to come on air. Adventure story time would probably be a better description as we listened to the deliciously scary episodes of Leonard Teale doing Superman, there was also Tarzan of the Apes, Hop Harrigan, and Captain Silver and the Sea Hound. Great adventures for the imagination of a growing boy.

Veronica's parents bought us presents for Christmas which we loved though our parents were embarrassed by the gesture because they couldn't reciprocate.

There was a sad ending to this family story, however, as one year the mother and daughter returned to Germany for a holiday and never returned. Mr Hoffman was left behind and ended up dropping out of the area and living somewhere in Footscray.

As more migrants settled in the street we became friendly with the Montebello children, a Maltese family across the road; the two boys, Charlie and Alfie, and two girls, Emily and Rita, became part of our regular circle of childhood friends. Joe Kiezyk next door became a close friend and as teenagers we often went fishing together down to the Maribyrnong River. Michael Kasjan across the back and Victor Dalinkiewicz became friends when we played cricket with other neigbours out on the street.

Shopping

When we first arrived there were no shops in our immediate area. A few were near the railway station but I was too young to wander around there on my own. Mum would go by train to Footscray or the Victoria Market and come back laden with string bags of goodies. If we saw her coming back my sister and I would we would rush up the street to give her a hand.

Mum and dad had established a vegetable garden, and they would grow as much as they could. It would have been what they were accustomed to back home, as they both came from farming backgrounds. They planted rows of potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, beans and peas, all kinds of staple produce. In the summertime the watermelons and cantaloupes were luscious treats. Dad planted what fruit trees he could: apples, plums, pears, walnuts, apricots, peaches.

The bread was sold from the streets in a real horse-drawn baker's cart. The baker was a regular and we children would sometimes have the responsibility to buy the square tin or vienna loaves. It was always so fresh and appetising and mum used to joke about the little mouse that must have nibbled away at the end of the crust between the time we got it from the baker and brought it to the kitchen.

One of the boys from up the street got a bit too daring one time in hopping onto the footplate at the rear of the cart when the driver wasn't looking; we weren't allowed to do that. He wanted the thrill of a free ride but unfortunately with the jolting of the cart his fingers got caught in the springleaf suspension he was screaming in pain. It took a couple of men with an axe to wedge apart the spring leaves to release his hand. His fingers must have been crushed. The other, horrified youngsters were wary of hitching such rides from then on.

The iceman used to come once per week and, in the summer time when we were about, he would chip off these lovely cold shards for us to chew on, that quickly disappeared in our hot little hands. I'm told a butcher also delivered a couple of times a week but I do not remember him at all.

Once in a while, or it may have been once a year, the potato man would circle the streets and sell sacks of potatoes from his truck. Most people bought from him if their own produce was insufficient. After dad died mum could not keep up with the gardening on her own and used to buy a sackful when she could afford it because it was cheaper and more convenient in this quantity anyway. Potatoes would have been a staple food for many people.

By the mid-fifties there were about twenty different shops and businesses in central St Albans around the railway station and the adjoining main roads. A real little metropolis. I remember dad taking us there one evening when one of the shops had installed a television set in their front window. It was an amazing sight. There was a crowd of budding TV addicts gazing in wonder at this marvel. A Mickey Mouse cartoon was the thing I remember about the night with the weird-looking cartoon gang marching around the globe of the earth.

Father's Work

My father worked mainly as a labourer and process worker in various factories, and at times he was also unemployed. For a while he was with the farm harvester factories in Sunshine; the changing names of HV McKay, Sunshine Harvester, Massey Harris, and Massey Ferguson were a source of work for many men in the area.

For a while he was in Borthwicks, a meat processing plant in Braybrook, where his position was a slaughter labourer and he operated one of the blood byproduct boilers. He took us down there one Christmas for the workers' family Christmas party and showed us his work section. It was probably in 1957.

He brought home what food he could from the job. The workers had a system of identifying the cart of meat cuts that was available for sharing, so perhaps there was surplus produce or offcuts. One time he even brought home a little orphaned lamb in his Gladstone bag. It was such a tiny little creature which grew up chasing after us and tripping us up as we ran. We called it Borek. But of course dad as the ever pragmatic family provider eventually killed it for the meat. Helen told me that we children refused to eat the meat.

Sometimes dad was unemployed but I

don't think I was really aware of this. I was only aware that when he was at home he would be working on the house. He would also take on odd jobs for friends and would often be paid in kind rather than money, and sometimes that would be in wine or beer, which mum wasn't too happy about. I think that's how we got the radio. It was an old valve radio with a 78 RPM record player in the top. I think dad liked to listen to the news.

We were allowed to listen to the Dad and Dave program that came on before the news. It was fun listening to the exploits of Dave and Mabel, cousin Bill and the others, because the stories of the characters of Snake Gully seemed exotic to us. Someone gave us some European records and we would listen to the Ukrainian and Polish tunes, not very often, because we didn't have the needles which needed replacing all the time. The radio was some comfort for mum because she found a program that played a variety of European music; I think it was called Continental Half Hour. She would listen to this when she could and I learnt to enjoy the music as well.

The St Albans men would exchange labour amongst themselves, particularly with the house building. Most of these men built their own houses and would help each other with the hard bits that needed extra hands, for example, the wall and roof construction. There would always be a celebration when all the rafters were installed - a shrub or branch of a tree was raised and prominently displayed on top of the roof to proclaim that another house frame had been successfully completed.

For a while Dad was working with a team of bricklayers and described how hard the work was on the hands, especially when they were throwing bricks up to the first floor and he was catching and stacking them. This was before the days of motorised brick escalators.

As well as working in the factory, my father also worked on the house and in the garden.

Dad was clever with his hands, he was a natural builder, a craftsman. The first job he did was to line our room. He did this with masonite which was a common material in use. It was light and probably relatively cheap, although at the time it was also a case of using what was available anyway. The other things he built quickly was the work shed and chicken shed.

The first stage of the extension house was the kitchen and small entrance separating it from the existing bedroom. So now we had a bedroom, a kitchen, and a small middle room with wardrobe space. It all looked so big in comparison to what we'd had that we were all impressed by the extra space.

Then dad started on the rest of the house. He dug all the foundation holes for the stumps, and the growing layer of bearers were also all his own work. Mum would help with the parts that she could, for there was always a spirit line or end of a long plank to be held. I was proud to have achieved my own set task, to saw off the end of one of the thin foundation markers. As a "find him something to keep him occupied and out of the way" task it had certainly worked. I felt good because I was helping dad.

Mum, Helen and I would help with holding up the weatherboards while Dad nailed them in place. We eventually helped to nail down some of the floor boards, which was also a rewarding team job. Dad would use the floor cramps to compress the series of boards until they were a tight fit and we would all hammer in nails along the pencil marks. Teresa was too small to take part. It was fun working together this way.

Dad died before he finished the internal lining of the rooms. My sisters and I would play in the unfinished sections of the house by dodging through the walls and climbing them when mum wasn't looking.

Mother's Hardships

Sometimes when dad was drunk he would get violent. Mum didn't like his drinking, especially when there was not enough money for food and other essentials. I think poverty was a strain on both of them. Sometimes he would threaten her with his cut-throat razor and this frightened us all. Mum would hide the razor until he sobered up again. I remember Helen and I both trying to get between them to protect mum at times. I don't know what they argued about.

Mum was really frightened when dad tried to hang himself. So was I the time I saw him late one night trying to do it off the doorknob of our bedroom. I remember trying to help mum but would have been too small to have been of any real assistance.

Mum must have been very lonely at times and had no one to turn to. She had several nervous breakdowns. The first time I was aware of it was after she tried to commit suicide and ended up in a psychiatric hospital. Dad had to look after us on his own, and that was the first time I remember getting some money to buy lunch at school. We didn't understand where mum had been taken. I was in grade two or three at St Albans East. I don't know how long she was gone for.

Mum's second breakdown was after dad died. I remember the police cars on the street, but I don't recall much else as I wasn't allowed inside to see the body and I blocked off as much as I could of my feelings. I was probably in shock.

Father's Death

On the 14th November 1958 my father hanged himself from the rafters in the hallway, an event that led to my mother having her second nervous breakdown and my two sisters and I being put into institutional care.

It was an event that shaped my introverted character and periods of severe depression for most of my teenage life, and even occasionally afterwards. My long-term reaction was probably exacerbated by the previous occasions when I had seen him try to do the same thing unsuccessfully, and witnessing Mum's own attempt at hanging herself in the shed two years earlier had been an incomprehensible, numbing experience. Shock has the effect of numbing the senses, and at times I would retreat to that stage of deep withdrawal that tried to block the outside world from hurting you any further.

I was numb, which eased the pain, but it still hurt a lot when strangers stopped me in the street to ask me about the hanging. I was depressed about it all. I didn't understand why they were bothering me, why they couldn't understand enough to leave me alone.

Mum had a complete breakdown and was again hospitalised. Her distress was immense and not something I could understand. She was hallucinating, talking to people who weren't there, tearing the black trimming off the neighbour's cushions because black was the colour of death and it distressed her. She was constantly crying uncontrollably and inconsolably. At times she would be oblivious of our presence, then she would be concerned beyond all measure for us deep within her distress and despair but unable to bring it under any control. We didn't know what to do and I don't know for how long this went on, I think I was pretty spaced out myself. It was up to the neighbours to call for medical help which was probably done through the police. Mum was placed into a psychiatric institution while Helen and I went into separate institutional care facilities near Mount Royal Hospital. Though we didn't know it, Mum was nearby at the Royal Park Psychiatric Centre. I think Teresa on that occasion was looked after by a Polish family from St Albans.

It's hard as ten-year-old to know what to do when your world is falling apart. In St Albans, suicide by hanging was not unknown, though it was not often talked about, and certainly not by me, as I was deeply traumatised by what the family went through. Being separated from my sisters and mother probably didn't help.

In mid 1959 my older sister and I were finally allowed to come back home to Mum. As uncertain as our future was, the family was the best comfort in the world that I knew of.

Adversity and Achievement

It must have been very hard for mum, in particular after my father's death. She had virtually no help, I don't know how we managed to survive as a family. Retrospectively, I realise there was no income for some time, so mum must have depended on charity and what food she had grown to feed us.

Mum had several nervous breakdowns. This really freaked me out at the time. She must have been overcome by the lack of money for feeding and clothing us all, the lack of support. The children were cared for by neighbours at first, then went into institutions. We had no relatives in Australia and even though the neighbours helped with what they could after dad died they had their own problems and children to feed.

Life was hard for everyone. We had little of anything, but it was less of a consumer society. When Helen went to high school one of the teachers there was a great help because it was with her assistance that we were able to get some regular support from the government.

One thing I have learnt is that survival in itself is an achievement. Reminiscing often produces an element of attractive nostalgia and I suppose like anyone else I sometimes look back in fondness to youth and childhood innocence and that sort of romantic idyll, but these days I'm more prepared to acknowledge the darker side.

My parents accepted the challenge of settling into a strange, usually indifferent country, and they worked hard at it. Mum appeared to be the frailer parent, yet she's the one who survived and raised three children on her own, and that has to be acknowledged as an achievement. I've often said that having a roof over our heads was one of the major successes that was able to keep the family together. Even though we were split up several times mum had something to which she could bring us back together. I doubt that we would have survived intact without it.

Relationship with Father

I don't remember a whole lot about my father, which is a sad comment. I've mentioned him spending time with me in the migrant hostel, and I liked being with him when he was building things because this always impressed me as very clever. However, I mostly remember the things that he did rather rather than him as an individual personality. I now realise that he was clever at adapting things and improvising, with making-do with the materials and tools that were available to him. He built the house virtually on his own which is a remarkable achievement. He was good at metal work and hand-built our first wood-fired stove which was in the shed. He probably scrounged most of the metal from the tip, but did such a great job of it, lined the fire section with clay, had proper controlled heat flow over and under the oven, and a damper control.

(The local tip was within walking distance of home, where the road to Keilor dipped down into Green Gully. There had been some excavations there for sand extraction, and the holes were now being filled with garbage disposal. It was a good spot for scrounging the usual discarded building materials, metal, etc, and is featured in many people's memory as a useful resource for materials when times were tough.)

I was frightened of my father when he was drunk because I didn't understand this, nor why he was aggressive towards mum. At the better times I sometimes went with him to visit his colleagues. Being with the men when they were sitting around joking and carrying on, smoking, even having a beer, was an exciting insight into the adult male world that wasn't obvious through home life. I remember going with him one time by train to Sunshine and he stopped at the pub to have a beer and bought me a lemonade. I thought it was wonderful to be included in such a manly activity.

Relationship with Mother

I think I was a very reserved character as a child. I occasionally saw mum in difficult circumstances which I didn't understand and there was nothing I could do. Some earlier happy times together included her telling us fairy tales and making Christmas decorations by gluing up paper chains and streamers. I thought she was very clever making glue from flour and water as Helen and I cut up strips of paper.

When I was older I took her for granted a lot of the time. I knew she loved me but I guess I didn't show the return feelings often enough; on the other hand I wasn't particularly demonstrative to anyone in this respect. It became more difficult in teenage years as more and more I grew away from the Polish language. I know I was fairly inarticulate in this my so-called mother tongue. I was not a very talkative boy even in English. Communicating with mum was hard as I couldn't really speak fluently in Polish and she couldn't understand that much in English.

The closest thing that we did together when I was a teenager was going with her to the English classes. She was enrolled in evening classes which were held in my old primary school. I went with her because it was dark and she wanted some company. That didn't feel too bad because there were other people whose English was of similar standard so I didn't feel embarrassed about the whole exercise.

The text books were put out by the Department of Immigration for the "English for Newcomers to Australia" program. I didn't pay a lot of attention to this at the time but years later when I came across a copy of one text book I wondered what it must have sounded like to these adults, who mostly would have had their education interrupted by the war and were now having to struggle, for example, with the differences between the perfect and perfect continuous tenses. Let me quote: "We use the perfect continuous tense when we speak of an action or state that began in the past, is happening when we speak and which will probably continue for some time." Did you know that there are five groups of irregular verbs? Can you name them?

I wouldn't be surprised if it seemed pretty mystifying or irrelevant in the daily lives of these men and women. What I liked about mum doing this class was the sense that she was trying to learn the ways. I thought that was great. It seemed nice and normal.

That was one of the odd things about our settlement experience. The philosophy of migrant settlement at this time has been characterised as assimilationist, that is, that migrants would give up their original language and culture, learn to fit in with Australian ways, and gradually get absorbed, assimilated, into the Australian life. The problem with this in places like St Albans was that all of the people around us were Europeans, so how could they learn to fit in with Australian ways?

Many people tell stories of travelling on the trains and being told that they weren't allowed to speak foreign languages, that they had to speak English. Some older Australians later explained they were worried that these newcomers were complaining about them and their lifestyles.

I was embarrassed by mum's lack of English at times, and occasionally having to interpret for her when often I didn't know the Polish words well enough to do a good job myself, e.g. when I went with her to the doctor. Helen was much better at this. At home we spoke what I later referred to as "kitchen Polish" which was the simple childhood language register that is not particularly extensive or articulate. As a family we didn't progress linguistically much further than that, and I think it was probably because we didn't have the benefit of overhearing adult conversations to guide us.

Mum wasn't a great talker either as far as I remember. As soon as we were at school and talking English with our school mates we spoke English most of the time. Polish was a language we spoke at home with mum. Nowadays I can laugh and admit that I could only speak "broken Polish" whereas mum could only speak "broken English".

Ethnic Identity

I was not conscious of having a strong 'ethnic' identity, though sometimes I felt different to other children at school. I identified more with my mother's origins because we spoke Polish at home and she brought us up in the Catholic faith. We would go to with her to Polish Mass on Sundays. There were some Polish nuns from

Essendon who ran the Polish language classes for children in St Albans on Saturdays. These were held in a room at the back of the Catholic church. Helen and I would go there together. We would complete our homework on the kitchen table and mum was happy to see us doing the work; I think it was one of the few educational tasks for which she could offer guidance. I did feel happy doing this. I attended during 1957 and 1958, but obviously would have stopped when we went into the children's home, and I don't think we restarted.

I knew my Polish wasn't 'proper' because when I stayed with the Wyka family they used different words and verb declensions. My younger sister also mentions recognising that other families we visited spoke a slightly different form of Polish than we did at home. Mum spoke village Polish, and I assume that there may have been variations of this. Dad spoke Serbian, so I suppose we spoke a mixture of both languages when at home.

More recently in my professional life, that is in the 1990s through my work at the St Albans Migrant Resource Centre, I have related to my Polish background a lot more than in the previous forty years. This is because I had taken on a support role with the regional Polish community welfare association. I was on the committee of management and was involved in building up the range of support services for the older and the recent immigrants. I assisted with documenting the needs of Polish-Australians. It has been pleasing to see this organisation receive recognition for the work its carried out.

I helped establish the first Polish senior citizens club in St Albans, and now there are three separate clubs in Brimbank, developed of their own initiative.

These are people of my mother's generation and I was pleased to have something to offer them, and that they accepted me as part of their community. I guess the satisfaction in my role here was possibly a belated support role for my mother's generation through the community with which she identified.

Because my father died when I was fairly young his ethnic background had less influence over my identity and community relationships than did my mother's. She had no other connections with the Serbian or Yugoslav communities so they played no part in our family life. During the '90s I had worked with the Serbian community in the region, attempting similar things as with Polish welfare, but the Serbs were much more fragmented. Through my work I also tried to develop and coordinate research into the needs of the elderly and the recent arrivals. Some of this had been successful, but the attempts at establishing a community welfare infrastructure in the region had been much less successful. However, some of the friendly visiting services that exist today are due to my efforts.

The Catholic faith was important for my mother. She took us to church on Sundays, and we went to Catholic school for several years as well as progressing through the usual ceremonial stages such as first holy communion and confirmation. While at Catholic school I was part of the boys choir for a while and we sang at a few church services, but I don't think it lasted very long. One problem for me was that when a practice or performance was on after hours mum was reluctant to let me go, and I was happy enough not to argue with her about it.

In retrospect I realise that I was disappointed with the church for not really helping us out at our time of need. At least that's the way I rationalise it now. Mum had always been a church goer, the three children attended the local catholic school, and the nuns at the school certainly knew that dad had died and that mum was experiencing a crisis of some sort, but no one from the church seemed to do anything, at least as far as I recall. Granted that one time my sisters were looked after by nuns in a convent somewhere in Albert Park. But when mum was going through her crisis there was no one from the church to talk to her or show some understanding.

One time in the distraction of her grief, and I presume she was turning to God for help, she started to clean up the crucifix memorial near the church, and a nun came and told her off.

Mum was quite distressed again when the parish priest refused to accept dad's coffin into the church because he wasn't Catholic. This really upset her. Much later, when I could think about such issues more clearly for myself, I thought that religion, or at least the church, for mum at this time of crisis in her life, could offer little comfort or support. It seemed unfair.

The only one who did help was the Polish priest, Father Krasocki, who came with us to the burial at Footscray and conducted a little ceremony over the coffin at the cemetery. He was also the one who helped mum get out of Sunbury Psychiatric Hospital at one of the times of her hospitalisation after dad died. Because mum's distress had stabilised she could have been released home under the care of a responsible adult, but of course we didn't have any relatives so there was no one who could

accept the responsibility or sign the release. Eventually the Polish priest did sign her out, but I think even then he had been reluctant to do so and had been pressured by Mrs Wyka who wanted to see us kids reunited with mum. But at least he did help.

I drifted away from the church in my mid teenage years. This wasn't a particularly conscious or traumatic decision, it was more like an atrophy of relevance over time. Father Val Noone was an example of a different type of priest; he seemed more attune to the daily lives of us teenage boys, and I remember him in discussions at the high school. He even occasionally played basketball with us, which was unheard of compared to the other priests I had known. He was a good person to talk to, and it's undeniable that some empathetic discussions often help bring your own problems into a more realistic perspective.

Several years later my older sister, Helen, wanted to get married in the Catholic church but the priest refused - it wasn't possible because she was marrying an Orthodox rather than a Catholic man. So the wedding ended up being held in the Orthodox church, which welcomed and blessed the ceremony and the wedding vows were held on their premises. All three of her children were later christened in the Orthodox church, but the kids themselves are not church-goers.

Both my sisters had maintained their religion, but each had chosen other churches in which to practice their faith. Religion itself has been more important to them than the specific church in which it is conducted, if that explanation makes sense. My younger sister and her family are regular church participants within a very caring Christian community.

Education and Employment

My sister Helen started at St Albans Primary in 1953. The following year I also was taken there to be enrolled, but the school was already full to the brim (according to family lore) and they told Mum to bring me back next year. So, I didn't start school that year.

Grade 1B, 1955. J Ribarow is at the rear, second from the left.

I started school in 1955 when I was nearly seven. This sounds quite old these days, but it wasn't unusual for some of the European families, for example, in Poland before the war it would have been fairly normal for village children to start their schooling about that age; but most likely it was that the local primary school was absolutely full - they were bussing children to other suburbs - so deferring new enrollments was a strategic decision.

I may have learnt a few English words from Helen, but still I found the school system quite strange because I didn't understand the language. When the St Albans East Primary started, I was sent there; that was grade two, probably in 1956. I think the Catholic school extended its buildings in the following year and I was transferred there.

In 1961 I went to the St Albans High School. I enjoyed high school for the friendships, also subjects like mathematics, physics, and English. Some of the teachers were interesting personalities who encouraged you to extend your intellectual horizons.

I wasn't a brilliant student; I passed my matriculation with a second class honour in physics, which I was pleased about, but with a fail in chemistry, which I wasn't particularly good at and didn't particularly enjoy.

My tertiary studies were erratic. In 1967 I was offered a place at Monash University to do Sciences, but decided against that because of the travel and lack of financial support.

I enrolled in a teacher training course through the Melbourne Teachers College, which provided a studentship allowance, but I didn't even survive the first year because my study skills were not good enough. I was very depressed about it and hid my failure from the family for months. My mother and older sister supported me and encouraged me to regain my confidence.

I soon discovered one of the paradoxes of educational achievement - some employers thought I was overqualified, some that I was under-qualified, so neither of these types were interested in me. I never was a confident or assertive teenager and a sequence of these rejections affected me more than they should have. So I learnt the hard way that to get a job you have to tailor your background details to suit the requirements of the position. It may not have been entirely honest, but at least you got a job.

Eventually I reduced my expectations and got a job at Spauldings in Albion and worked there about a year just to earn some money. Working as a labourer and process worker in a rubber factory certainly introduces you to what you don't want to do for the rest of your life, so when I had saved enough money I bought a motorcycle and started doing a business studies course at the Footscray Institute. I was there a couple of years before I ran out of money. But by then I had improved my

study skills and regained my confidence.

I worked in a variety of jobs: the credit office at Myer Melbourne, interviewing for market research companies, petrol pump jockey, dismantling cars at a wrecking yard, maths tutor, painting ... you name it. I gradually became involved in voluntary community work, which became my main interest.

By the early 'seventies it was pretty obvious that many people in the area were pro Labor, and when the Australian Labor Party with Gough Whitlam as its leader was elected to government it was a real morale booster in the west.

St Albans was experiencing a transition. Second generation migrants were progressing through secondary and tertiary studies and taking a direct interest in community participation and social action. The abolition of university fees meant that young people from working class backgrounds could afford to study at university. It was a time of optimism and energy. Women had finally received equal pay, which was a significant milestone in the struggle for gender equality. Young people who had agitated against the war in Vietnam now turned to protest about the French nuclear testing in the Pacific. Children who'd cut their teeth as intermediaries between family and public worlds were learning to make their voices heard.

Political involvement in local and national concerns became an interest, particularly as eighteen-year-olds could now vote. Neighbourhood action was generated around the issues of health, education, child care, poverty, and feminism. Regional agitation developed local consciousness, identity, and social planning: education action, deprived west seminars, regional council for social development, regional commission, and even funding from Canberra. The best thing about it all was that people were working together whether they were first or third generation St Albanites. It was really exciting.

I became involved with several local groups, including the Western Region Council for Social Development. It was an excellent introduction to grass roots community action and social planning. In St Albans, with the strong support of our local councilors, we lobbied to form a new community centre, which received funding through the WRCSD. This led some of us to experiment with the establishment of a Learning Exchange. People involved with this included Danny Vadasz, Lindsay Chatterton, Anne Ferguson, Elaine Cameron, and others I've already forgotten. Our inspiration was the innovative leadership of John and Kerry Burke from the Malvern Learning Exchange, who even came to St Albans to give a real hands-on demonstration of their publication processes. This type of networking introduced us to new people and new ideas. Unfortunately, the St Albans Learning Exchange did not survive the inevitable outflow of its volunteers into further education and employment careers, but it sparked a number of interests that continued under other auspices.

In 1976 I was accepted into a social work course at Phillip Institute in Bundoora, and completed the course in 1979. I have worked in the community services sector and local government ever since. My first professional position was as a social worker with Ethnic Care Force in Thomastown; this was sponsored by St Johns Home for Boys and Girls, a part of the Anglican welfare system. Then I worked at Footscray Council as a generalist social worker and counsellor in their Community Services Department.

I had married in 1976 and separated in 1988, when I quit the council job and enrolled in a computer science course at La Trobe University. It was really an opportunity to reflect on what I was going to do for my personal future rather than as a new career aspiration.

I started working at the St Albans MRC late in 1989 as the executive officer and worked there long enough to qualify for long service leave. Some of my work at the MRC was really exciting community development, and some of the things so boringly bureaucratic they would have been rejected from the script of "Yes Minister" as being too outlandish to be believable. Overall, it was a very positive experience because of the interest and support of many individuals working together for the community's benefit.

I had been having a number of health problems during the '90s. I nearly died in 1993 due to complications related to gallstones. I've had hypertension ever since then and this started to get worse in 1999. My doctor was telling me I had to change my life - the usual: don't work so hard, reduce stress, lose weight, start to exercise regularly, change the diet, etc, etc.

I left the MRC in 2000 and did another year at Latrobe University to attain my Masters in Social Work. I enjoyed the year very much. I have been self employed since then, working as a consultant to several organisations. I find the part-time nature of this type of work a much

more stress-free existence, though the income is not as regular.

Family and Friends

My mother died of cancer in 1982 at the age of sixty-two. She had continued to live in the house in Henry street until she was too frail, and then moved in with Helen.

My sister Helen had married Basil Vasjuta and they built a home in St Albans, not very far away from my mother's place. Helen died of cancer in 1998, at the age of fifty-two. Her son, Paul, is married with two children and works for the Civil Aviation Authority. Both her daughters are working: Christina as a nurse, and Sonia in business administration.

Helen, my older sister, had been the most stable and supportive family figure in my life as a teenager, especially because she acted as a mediator between Mum and myself whenever needed. It really does make you realise how short life is and that there are some things you should do together while you can - to quote the late Harold Chatterton: "You're dead a long time."

My younger sister, Teresa, is married to Christpoher Crook, with four children and living out Geelong way. Of the two younger girls, Amy, is still at high school, and Maggie at university in Sydney. Penny is a primary school teacher, and James works as a computer graphics artist, tutor, and cartographer.

Other people have been helpful in the family's settlement.

Lorna Cameron was probably the first Australian who took any real interest in our family. This was through high school, though the help she provided had nothing to do with her role at the school. I suppose these days we would say she was a mentor for both Helen and myself. She went out of her way to accept people into her life, and at the same time encouraging them and supporting them to achieve some security and independent survival. She did this and helped many others despite being a widow with five children to support.

Wladimir Czernik was a Polish-Ukrainian man, the father of Otto Czernik, whom I met through high school, who also offered moral support for the family. My younger sister and I would spend time with the family, particularly with Otto and Helen who were our respective ages. The Czerniks had settled in the area about the same time as we did but we had not known each other earlier because their house was in another part of St Albans. They showed us an example of family stability and continuity, a role-model of family life. They also guided and encouraged us to support mum and each other in our daily lives. They were very caring people.

The Wyka family were supportive of me when they took me into their home one of the times that mum was hospitalised. I was there for some time until mum returned, but they never received any financial assistance and they never complained. I remember that all the children, particularly the older ones, Tony, Barbara, and Richard, seemed to accept it as natural that I was there. The Wykas were very kind and I really appreciate the support they gave us.

I've kept up a close friendship with a several school friends. Lindsay and Kathy Chatteron and I have played a weekly card for the last 18 years, and we have been in regular contact much longer than that. Peter and Olga Nowatschenko are also long-term friends. I've enjoyed being "Uncle Joe" to the Chatterton and Nowatschenko children as they were growing up; now they are all in university. Otto Czernik and I have progressed from the camaraderie of electronics to house construction and renovations. I've caught up again with Nick and Jutta Szwed, which has been a pleasant experience. (I'm surprised that Nick is still barracking for Collingwood as passionately as he did back in primary school. Oh well, I guess no one is perfect ...) I've enjoyed the class reunions that have started in recent times and hope they continue.

Immigration Consequences

In these days of economic rationalism some people question how successful the immigration program has been to Australia.

I believe you can see the benefits all around you. Not only in St Albans and Brimbank, but the whole western suburbs and many other regions of Melbourne. If it wasn't for immigration this would probably still be a semi-rural area of poor grazing land and marginal agriculture. The immigration-led boom of the 1950s not only supplied the labour for the factories but also the markets for the consumer goods. The multiplier effect of the demand for housing, community facilities and infrastructure, education and so on, are so well known that I don't need to repeat the argument.

Immigration brings in professionals and skilled workers as well as refugees and displaced persons. The experience all around the world is that lesser skilled immigrants take on the tough and dirty jobs that no one else wants to do, so they perform a necessary function in the labour force.

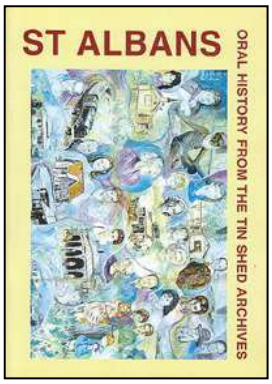
If you look at my family specifically, then it must be acknowledged that government support had been necessary, in terms of unemployment benefits or sickness benefits, at the times when my father was unemployed and then later when my mother was too sick to work. But I've worked since I was fourteen, starting part-time when I was at high school. I have never applied for unemployment benefits, and only once received sickness benefits for about three weeks in the last forty-five years. Mind you I'm not saying there is anything wrong with receiving unemployment benefits if you need to, because

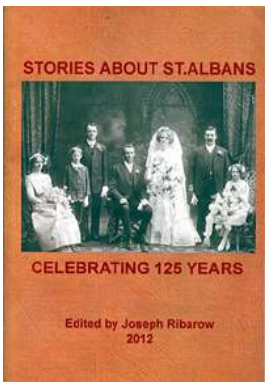
that is part of the social contract that is important for people to survive in the modern world.

My sisters have also worked since their teenage years and have successfully raised families who also are working productively and contributing to society through their individual families and personal activities. For many years we have all contributed to society through voluntary community work, which includes church work, youth activities, community welfare, neighbourhood centres, and fund raising for a variety of causes, just to name a few. To me this is all part of the success of the original family settling into and becoming an integral part of mainstream Australian society.

Today we are inextricably part of Australian society, and Australia is inextricably part of our lives. To me that's undeniable success.

Although I no longer live in St Albans I am still involved with it, particularly through the St Albans Community Youth Club as a volunteer and with their committee of management.





In recent years I have been documenting the history of the neighbourhood and its people, because I believe there are many unique and interesting stories amongst the diversity of its residents that deserve to be acknowledged and appreciated. It still has a quirkiness that is refreshing. Last year, as I turned up for a meeting at the Youth Club, a white streak flashed past me on the road. I turned around, and there was a goat running full pelt down the middle of the main road amidst the unconcerned traffic. I thought: where else but St Albans ...

Joseph Ribarow, 2003

Laurie Schwab: Soccer Promoter, Sports Writer, Newspaper Editor

Fritz and Ingeburg Schwab came to Australia in 1954 under the Australian German Assisted Package Scheme and were settled at the Migrant Reception Centre at Bonegilla. Their children were Lorenz (Laurie) born in 1947 and Katrin born in 1948. The Schwabs were lucky to have escaped Germany, especially as other family members did not. Fritz was of Jewish background on his father's side and when the parents were sent to a ghetto Fritz and his sister Helga were sent to an "Arian" grandmother in Berlin. They later fled to Prague and then to Switzerland. When the Swiss closed their borders they went to Belgium where they sought a passage to America but ended up in Australia.

The family moved to Errington Street St Albans in 1955, which became home for Inge and Fritz for the rest of their lives. Their daughter Olivia (Lilli) was born in Australia. All three of the children attended St Albans High School, with Laurie starting in 1960 in Form 1D: his classmates included Ivan Volkov, Vlad Turok, Cathy Hatjiandreou and Heather Goddard.

Fritz and Inge were business oriented and soon after establishing themselves in St Albans they were importing "all things German" including books, magazines, and festive decorations and paraphernalia for a growing immigrant population that was keen to keep in tough with its cultural heritage. Fritz was also a sports promoter: he wrote a regular sports column for "Die Woche" and other German newspapers, reporting on German and Australian athletics including football, boxing, cycling and swimming. He brought several German and European boxers to compete in Australia.

Laurie became a sports writer, like his father. He started as a reporter with the Footscray Mail in the late sixties and also worked for the Werribbee edition of the paper. He later joined The Age and thus obtained a much broader audience of readers, especially when founded and edited "Soccer Action" which was published by Fairfax. He also worked in a senior editorial roles in Fairfax suburban newspapers. He occasionally appeared on ABC radio as a sports commentator. Schwab became one of Australia's most popular and respected soccer journalists, especially after 1977 when the National Soccer League was formed and introduced a national competition, the first football code to do so in Australia. The relationship was not always amicable, as the NSL tried to ban him for referring to the soccer

clubs' original ethnic names. The ban did not succeed. Schwab continued his soccer coverage for a couple of decades but died unexpectedly of a heart attack in 1997, aged 50.

Speech given at Silver Jubilee Celebration and the Naming of the Keith Haynes Oval, 1981

Welcome and Introduction

Your Excellency Sir Henry Winneke, Lady Winneke, Mrs Haynes, Mr Mayor, Commissioner Gillon, Ladies and Gentlemen. I thank you on behalf of the former students of St Albans High School.

I think, Sir Henry, this visit could pay off for you. I understand you were a legal man of some ability before taking this job. The fact is, former students of this school get into lots of trouble ... see me later ... I might be able to put a bit of work your way. Help keep the wolves from your door, you know.

And I wonder if you could clarify this business about Prince Charles becoming the next Governor General. Is it true that an exchange program is being worked out—Prince Charles for Governor General, Malcolm Fraser for King? No?

Aspirations and Competition

Talking about exchange programs, it reminds me of one of my many failures at school. I applied for an exchange scholarship to go the United States. Jan Griffiths got it instead.

So, on a more parochial and probably more ambitious level, I decided I'd try to be a football star. That was no good either. I was surrounded by the likes of Les and Garry Cameron, Ray Haynes, Ange Tantsis, Mike Pokrovki, and Dave Taylor, who made me feel positively inferior.

But it was the era of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and so I was inspired to perhaps reach the dizzy heights of show business. Fat chance. Broderick Smith did that and so did Katie Akterburg and Jutta Aukshtulewicz, while I still can't hold a note.

Not to worry, thought I. I did have other talents. I was dedicated to learning, for example. Or was I? I seriously began to doubt it as everyone else did all the achieving. Doctors started to emerge: Alex Bezborodoff, Claude Calandra, Enver and Tim Baraszewski, Tony Venes, and Peter Bevs ... We had solicitors like Victor Mahorin for example. There's a university lecturer as well, Sneja Gunew, the first St Albans High student to win an exhibition at Matric. And it's the name of my sister Lilli that's up there on the honours board, not mine.

But there were other possibilities for me. What about politics? The hustings, the wheeling and dealing, the long knives ... No. I fell by the wayside, while Marija Biewer and Alex Adrianopoulos became Keilor City councillors and Rosemary Kiss a councillor at Fitzroy.

Then I set my sights on becoming a journalistic giant, but Tanya Korinsky is doing that from Tokyo of all places.

In the world of business I could never match Knut Werner, Ivan Volkov or George Swadiak … I thought about teaching but there were 695 qualified teachers among our ex-students, still waiting to get a job.

I wonder why they asked me to make this speech; I'm a bit of a failure, really. Let's hope my son Adam does a bit better. He started here this year.

Ungers and The Arcade

I did, however, contribute, along with most other students, to the development of this town's commerce. If Mr Unger is here, I think he should stand and put his hands together for the generations of Coca-Cola guzzlers who have passed through this school and his shop.

School principals contributed in like manner. The establishment known simple as 'The Arcade' experienced a major boom in trade every time one principal or another declared it off limits. And what about the tobacco shops and the hotel ... ?

Celebrating Community

There is another very significant way in which so many former students have contributed to the community. They don't live here anymore. That's not quite true of course. Whatever sense of community does exist in St Albans is due to our schools and their former students—kids from all over the world, or at least of migrant families—growing up here, forming friendships, marrying, pursuing their interests through the sports clubs, the churches, and, notably, through its great Champion Lorna Cameron, has claimed the interest of so many kids for longer or shorter periods throughout these 25 years.

What makes this school unique is that it had the languages, the attitudes, and the traditions of most of the world within its walls at a time when St Albans grew up as a truly International Village.

The very decision to leave the home country and travel to an unknown new world indicates the enormous strength of will that characterises our people.

There were problems, sure, social problems associated with language, employment, and with the human spirit itself. The problems surfaced within families and in this school. But I wonder how much more we gained from each other in terms of human insight than students of more conventional schools. If we feel proud of our own very diverse backgrounds, then surely we must feel proud of having gone to this school and having lived in this town.

Governments have largely ignored the western suburbs — when will that ever change — but we must concede that they have been

kind to St Albans High School, as our excellent facilities testify.

A Dedication to the Haynes Family

We are here to commemorate the opening of the latest of these facilities: the new-look oval named after the school's most faithful servant, Keith Haynes. Keith was our foreman here from the time the school opened. He was a sympathetic guide and friend to many a kid who needed help or merely contact. He was involved with kids through the local cricket, football, and youth clubs. I remember many a pie night at the Haynes' home in Main Road East while Keith was helping to look after the youth club's footy team.

Now his wife, Bess, has taken over as foreman here and she too is always ready to extend a helping hand. The six Haynes children — Ray, Philip, Graham, Bonny, Elizabeth, and Geoff — all went to this school and all have good reason to be proud of their dad and the work he did here.

Laurie Schwab, 1981.[1]

Changing Times as St Albans High School becomes St Albans Secondary College, 1990

"I went to St Albans High school during the sixties," I tell the student showing me to the room with the coffee and the sandwiches where people are waiting for Education Minister Joan Kirner to arrive. In fact my two sisters, Katrin and Lilli, and later my two sons, Adam and Jason, also went to this school. So did many of those who are among my closest friends.

"Did you like it?" he asks. I want to tell him that I like it more and more as the years go by - not that I ever disliked it - but I just say "Yeah."

Back in the sixties the times were a-changing for most of us. Was it really something peculiar to that era or do times still a-change that way?

Back in the early sixties it was plain old St Albans High School: perched on mud in winter, dust in summer, two grey bunkers in single file. I have come back for the renaming of the school after its recent two million dollar facelift, as the St Albans Secondary College.

Teenagehood in the sixties was a time of striving for identity, rejecting what we knew was claptrap, and learning to go with the changing times. Teachers were dismayed because children were supposed to be subservient.

[1] Speech by Lorenz Schwab at St Albans High School's Jubilee celebration and naming of the new school oval, 27 March 1981.

Laurie Schwab and colleagues with Joan Kirner, 1990

If you made a movie about it these days you'd dream up supercharged tales, each of them a parable. But life is not like that. At St Albans High in second and third forms, the action was more about rolling your shirt sleeves up no higher than two inches from the wrist, making your pants as tight as possible, having your cap perched on the back of your head to show off your hairstyle, and scowling a lot.

Inspired by the world-wide protest movement, school jumpers got longer and longer. I switched from regular school uniform to the longest jumper I had, which happened to be blue instead of gray, and harassment by the headmaster was the price I paid. "Spud" Murphy was suspended over the length of his jumper so we ran a letter campaign through the local paper on the theme "What length freedom?" Caps became a rare species and rightly so, as the combination of Brylcream, sweat, and dust built up grime deposits on both cap and head. Skirts became shorter and shorter making it a time of heady romance and hearty loins.

Students took their morning and afternoon smokos in nearby Lyall and Vista streets, until the headmaster announced at one Monday morning assembly that the area would be strafed every recess.

I remember the school excursion to a Bacchus Marsh quarry as part of our geological awareness education. We hated such school excursions, apart from which the boys were in one bus and the girls in the other. At Bacchus Marsh, Knut Werner and I made sure of missing the boys' bus back but the teachers wouldn't let us on the girls' bus so we had to hitchhike home. As punishment for this escapade we were banned from future excursions. This was an unforeseen but much appreciated consequence, as we could not have been happier with the result.

When our initial burst of competitiveness at football, deadly dull cricket, swimming, cross country running and other forms of athletics (tunnel-ball would you believe?) dissipated, sport became uncool in our crowd so we stole away instead to Unger's for Coke and to the Arcade -

declared off-limits by the headmaster - for fish and chips. Never have fish and chips tasted so good.

Unfortunately there was a lunatic fringe among the teaching staff: misfits who got their kicks from verbal sadism and physical belligerence. Twins who paid one such teacher back in kind outside of school hours gained both notoriety and celebrity status in absentia. But the rev-heads on the teaching staff were heavily outnumbered by decent and inspiring people, epitomised by senior mistress Mrs Alice Gliddon, who gave us an appreciation of literature, and our inspiring maths teacher Mr Barry Rayner, who was young enough to be on our wavelength.

Many of us attended the school's Silver Jubilee in March 1981. Asked to speak on behalf of past and present students, I shared the stage with the then Education Minister, Alan Hunt, and the Governor, Sir Henry Winneke, at the formal opening of the Keith Haynes Oval, named after the late, long-serving school foreman who was succeeded by his wife, Bess Haynes. Back when the times were a-changing I would have thought consorting with governors and ministers was a sellout. But then, as now, I felt good about being there.

In the late fifties and the sixties St Albans High was unique in that it had the languages, attitudes, and traditions of most of the world within its walls. It was the cosmopolitan capital of Victoria if not Australia.

There was great strength among our townspeople. The very decision to leave the home country and travel to an unknown new world indicates the extent of the despair back home and the enormous willpower that characterised these people. Sure there were social problems associated with employment, language, and at times with the human spirit itself, and these problems surfaced within families and within school life. But we gained so much more from each other in terms of human insight than did students of more conventional schools. If we feel proud of our own very diverse backgrounds, we surely must have a warm feeling about being together in St Albans and at this school when the times were a-changing for all of us.

The students of St Albans High were big achievers in the days before migrant kids became the domain of social worker thinking. Enver and Tim Barajszewski, Claude Calandra, Tony Venes, Peter Bevs, and Alex Bazboradof, became doctors. In the world of show business, Broderick Smith has survived two decades of shifting musical tastes. Sneja Gunew is a now a university lecturer, Tanya Korinfsky is a globe trotting writer, Wally Kosiak a prominent engineer, Alex Andrianopoulos a State parliamentarian, Andy Kratsis a financial counsellor. George Swadiak, Ivan Volkov and Knut Werner, became successful businessmen. Garry and Les Cameron and Ray Haynes played VFL football. Garry also led the fight against irregularities at the St Albans Community Health Centre, resulting in government intervention to rectify matters. There were artistic talents like Norbert Loeffler, Henry Fuchs became a top-level government advisor, and Jan Griffin got the exchange scholarship to the USA that I really wanted. Such is life.

Laurie Schwab, 1990.[2]

Laurie Schwab & Broderick Smith 1996 Reunion

Postscript

Laurie passed away in 1997. Helen Schwab died in March 2012 while swimming in Queensland. She was born in England and came to Australia when she was five, and worked as an editor, designer and writer for magazines and publications. She represented Victoria on the Playgroup Council of Australia and represented them on a forum of the United Nations International Conference on Women. She helped preserve her husband's commitment to soccer journalism by establishing the Laurie Schwab foundation.

Helen and Laurie Schwab.

(These articles are taken from archival material provided by the late Lorna Cameron, 2004.)

[2] Article prepared by Lorenz Schwab when St Albans High School was renamed St Albans Secondary College in 1990.

John Simovic: Public Servant, Bank Manager, Security Worker

My parents were Stevan and Adelheid Simovic and they came to Australia in 1950. My father was a POW in Germany for four years – he had been in the Serbian King's army when he was captured and sent to work on a farm, which was the best thing ever. My mother was German and they obviously met during dad's time on the farm. They married and I was their only child, born in August 1948. We came to Australia in December 1950 and like many other immigrants at the time started off in Bonegilla. My father was then assigned work with the Victorian Railways at the Newport workshops, which is how we settled in Melbourne's western suburbs.

We moved from the Bonegilla hostel to Williamstown and were living at that hostel for a time before buying land in St Albans. I imagine that some of my father's friends and work colleagues had bought land there so we followed them. We moved to St Albans probably in 1951 or 1952 and my mother still lives here since that time. My father and his brother bought land next to each other so it was a little family cluster.

My uncle was a carpenter and established a joinery and cabinet works in Constance Street near the St Albans primary school. He worked from there for many years making kitchen cabinets and such. He also did sub-contract work for the Stevens brothers when they were selling land and housing packages; he built a lot of houses in the area. His wife became very sick and my mother looked after her for a while before she died. People of their generation often did not go to the doctors so readily. My uncle eventually moved to a farm in country Victoria and gave the house to his daughter who still lives there. He loved the farm life.

When we arrived in St Albans we were living in Pennell Avenue and there were only a few houses around us. At first we were in one of the half houses, a bungalow, until we had the money to extend. We lived there a while and then moved to Scott Avenue where we built a new house and sold the Pennell Avenue bungalow. In our neighbourhood there were only a few houses, one general store and one car that I remember. Perrett's was the closest general store not far away from us in Main Road West but later the Barbopoulos family established their milk bar on the corner of Cornhill Street. The Stevens family were the big land owners in the district with their old farm along Main Road West - the sons established several local businesses and also sold real estate.

There was only one primary school and that had over 40 nationalities enrolled when I started there; definitely multi-cultural. I remember Ahmed Ajayoglu and Peter Barbopoulos from primary school days. Ahmed was across the road from the school with their shop and the little chook farm. A few years later the St Albans East Primary School was established and a lot of my classmates from the eastern side of the railway line left for the new school, but I stayed. We met up again when we started at St Albans High School in 1961. The best years of our lives were in primary school where you had your friends, you played outside and life was simpler; there were no computer games - our electronic entertainment was the radio and then black and white TV came along. I think we had a good group of people at the Primary School and also at the High School.

At St Albans High I developed an interest in photography. Mr Ziemelis was one of the teachers at the school on the early sixties and introduced me to photography. I was in Form 3 at the time. I did a lot of photography for the school including class photos, sporting events and silly photos in classrooms and so forth. Ziemelis was a bit of a mentor; his speciality was teaching German and I always enjoyed his classes. I went to his home and he showed me what was possible in establishing darkroom developing and printing, etc. He loaned me one of his cameras and I ended buying a Pentax, which was of good quality, and I developed a passion for that. I set up my own developing and printing at home. It was a good interest and has resulted in some good records for the school. Not too many people had cameras in those early years.

Mr Ziemelis and Form 4A, 1964. J Simovic in back row, five from the left.

I remember some of the sporting events and Mr Ziemelis asked me to photograph some of the athletics and swimming. I was involved over about four years in taking the annual form photos and other school functions and a number of my photos were included in school publications. The Victorian Association of Photographic Societies organised an annual photographic competition for secondary schools and in 1965 and 1966 St Albans won several prizes and commendations. I was pleased to get a commendation in 1967 as did Max Costa and Victor Mago. I haven't kept up with my photography passion in its old form because technology has changed so much that now you do it all with your mobile phone and don't need darkrooms and developing fluids.

1967 was also the year that I was involved in the production of the school magazine, Alba. I was part of the editorial committee with David Beighton, Maija Svars, Marilyn Hulet and Leo Dobes.

John Simovic and Alba editors, 1967

I was tempted to take up photography as a career but went into the public service. This was just after high school. The commonwealth centre building was on the corner of Latrobe and Spring streets where the Immigration Department and other government offices were located – we called it the "green latrine" because the external cladding was all green. You had to sit an exam to determine eligibility for joining the public service, so I sat for that, passed the examination and joined the service in 1968. I stayed with the public service until 1989.

I worked in the section that was initially called Social Services before becoming Social Security and finally CentreLink. My role was being in charge of a team of 23 people in the registry where they kept track of all their pension files. Then I became a pensions officer and interviewed people regarding their applications pensions for aged, widow and single parent pensions and so forth. I had the job of a travelling pensions officer from Footscray which was our regional base to Werribee, Bacchus Marsh, Sunbury and such areas where we'd work from the court houses and speak with people.

One of the things I did when I was with Social Security was travel to country areas including Shepparton, Wangaratta and Geelong. I'd work at each centre for about three months at a time, staying in boarding houses or pubs and coming home on weekends to visit my mother and do the washing. I had an old FB Holden with a hole in the floor but it worked so on weekends I caught up with my old colleagues and workmates. Youd and Ziemelis became friends and I'd visit them at home or sometimes we'd meet for drinks with other friends.

Adelheid Simovic, John Simovic, Eric Youd, Martha Youd

I did that for many years and then I became section head in charge of all the pensions and became the assistant manager at Footscray Social Security. We had 99 people there so it was quite a big section. They built a large office for us and my task was to relocate operations from Barkly Street to the new offices.

From there I became the manager of various CentreLink offices in Newport, Werribee, Sunshine and St Albans. I went around the traps as the manager and ended up in St Albans, which was opposite the old police station in Main Road West and close to my old home. I was at the St Albans office for several years. Working in your home town can be awkward when you are in charge of a section and living in the same locality because people know you and if they don't like the decision instead of blaming the departmental guidelines they take it personally. But that's the nature of the beast. In the end they offered us the golden handshake, because when you are above a certain level in the public service they try to get rid of you. I was willing to consider that as I had been there for 22 years and was eligible for a package.

I accepted the package and found another job within a week, which was with the Commonwealth Bank in St Albans; it was still owned by the government then. During my first year there the notorious Christopher Binse and an accomplice held up the bank with sawn off shotguns. This was about 1988 and bank

security was not as extensive as it is these days. The police caught them in the end but it took a long time. I ended up staying with the Commonwealth Bank for 23 years. I worked mainly in customer service and then they made me a loans manager. I did that at various offices, interviewing people for home loans and personal loans. On occasions I was acting manager at several branches and ended up at Footscray where I was the assistant to the area manager looking after 12 branches in the training. When the job went Australia-wide I then became a business banker for my last years with the bank.

I retired from the bank in 2012 and went into security. I became involved with the security part-time during the last ten years of working at the bank. I was working on weekends doing security patrols, industrial estates, Blue Light discos and those sorts of events. When my friend who owned the company lost the contract I then applied and got a job at the National Gallery as an attendant looking after the artworks. The National Gallery is my preferred place of work because it is more interesting – there are various functions and the exhibitions are very valuable. I prefer to work on a casual basis and with other security work being available I can work as many days as I like and when I like.

Since I've left the public service, CentreLink has changed a lot and St Albans has changed a lot. The undesirable thing about St Albans is that we now have a high criminal element around where my mother lives. I've seen people shooting up near my mother's place and the police have raided neighbouring properties several times looking for drugs. Two days ago my wife and I went to see my mother and there was someone obviously under the effect of drugs staggering past her driveway - the safety aspect of St Albans is no longer there. People have been mugged even in the centre of town near the railway station. Near Cornhill Avenue, where Peter Barbopoulos's parents had their shop, there have been gang attacks. St Albans used to be a very safe area but unfortunately that is no longer the case.

The demographics of the west continue to change. When I has working in Footscray there were mainly Europeans, Greeks, Italians and so forth, and a lot of Australians. Then the change came with the Vietnamese community moving in and establishing businesses that renewed the business district. Now the African community is taking over some of the shops and businesses near the university though the Asian businesses are still predominant around the Nicholson and Barkly Street area. I worked for many years with the Commonwealth at their Footscray area office and we had police stationed upstairs with binoculars spotting the drug deals and we had machete attacks that occurred outside the office. We had to employ security guards outside because of the drug deals, people passing out and people throwing syringes in our bins. It was not a very pleasant area at that stage.

Since leaving the bank in 2012 I have helped out a lot more in the community as a volunteer. It began in the 'eighties when my sons were at school and I joined the Parents and Friends Association and did that for several years. In 1987 I became a scout leader when my son Michael joined the First Deer Park Scouts Group and I started their Ventura unit. I was with them about three years: took part in fund raising, went to all the training courses, even went to the big World Jamboree near Wollongong. My younger boy Andrew also joined the Cubs but did not stay as long.

My involvement with the St Albans Senior Citizens Club started two years ago when my mother had a fall and broke her hip. Previously, my parents used to come to the club in Arthur Street because it was the only club going at that time and they enjoyed the company and the outings and there were other German-speaking friends who attended there. That was twenty years ago. My mother continued coming to the club after my father died, but at the age of 83 when she broke her hip it became too hard for her walk or come by bus. To support her I decided to take Wednesdays off and drive her to the hairdresser and the seniors club. So the sons who bring their mothers to the club play pool while the mothers play Bingo.

I'm also a volunteer with Brimbank Council. I help out with functions and outdoor activities such as public events on recreation reserves, directing traffic in the car parks or whatever else is required, supervising some activities or taking on some security work. Volunteering is a way of giving back to the community; even when you stop work and retire it doesn't mean you have to just sit at home and stop being active. You need to keep your brain active.

With regard to my parents, St Albans has been their home since 1951. My father worked as a machinist with the railways until he had a heart attack and left due to ill health, which was all due to smoking. He passed away in 2003 at the age of eighty-three. My mother broke her hip in 2013 so now I'm helping to care for her. I take her out to the hairdressers and other appointments at least once a week and organise the house cleaning for her.

I've been married for 42 years. My wife and I have raised two sons: one is a cabinet maker, the other was with the tramways and is now running his own gardening business. Each of them has a son and a daughter.

John Simovic, 2015.

Broderick Smith: Blues Musician

Broderick Smith was born in 1948 in Hertfordshire, England. He came with his family to Australia in 1959, when he was aged 11 years. They settled in Belgrave Heights while his father had a job at the Black and Decker factory. Then they moved to the western suburbs because there were more employment opportunities.

The family settled in St Albans, and Broderick started at St Albans High School in 1960. But his first home in the area was only temporary accommodation:

"The first place my father managed to get in St Albans was a small shed at the back of a kindly Yugoslav family's home. There were four bunks in it and not much room for anything else. A black and white TV stood at the end, which we could all lean out of our bunks to watch."

Before long the family moved into their own bungalow in Main Road West:

"The front of it was covered with fibro concrete cement sheeting, which could be taken off when you decided to finish the place. We lived in one of these for a while and then my father got some money together to buy some land on the other side of town - Main Road East and that's where we had our own house built. It was a pink brick veneer and it had about as much character and charm as a dead pit bull."

Whilst at the High School, Broderick remembered being the young Pommie migrant amongst many other migrants from all over Europe:

"The west gave me a deep appreciation of the essence of people regardless of their race or religion. We treated each other honestly, person to person, free of prejudices that existed elsewhere. In those days St Albans was the last suburb west, so we had the advantage of jumping over the back fence and being in the country, or over the front fence and being in the city."

Here he displayed some aptitude with the harmonica and started experimenting in playing blues and folk music. He was inspired by the likes of American Blues artists Sonny Terrie and Brownie McGee, and he taught himself to play harmonica in the style of their music. Bob Dylan was another early influence. While many other young immigrants occasionally strummed a guitar or played the piano accordion for casual entertainment, Broderick developed his interests into his future career. He joined his first garage band in 1962 and played a bit of percussion, but he admits he didn't really know what he was doing. In 1963 he left school, and joined a shipping company as a messenger boy. He returned to school in 1964 for one year and then worked in a music store in Melbourne for three years as a clerk.

St Albans Blues Band

The family left St Albans in 1966 and moved to Craigieburn. Reflecting on this early settlement period he later explained: "My family have always been travellers. It's not something that we've always gone looking for. It's just happened. I guess it's because we said 'okay' when the opportunity came along."

Over the years Broderick has occupied himself in various ways to earn a living, including clerical work, storeman, copy writer in the advertising industry, a compulsory period as soldier due to the reintroduction of national service, and in recent years also as an actor on stage and screen. But he is best known for his long-term career as a singer-songwriter with a variety of blues and country rock bands, for whom he has fronted as a singer and harmonica player, and also known to play the banjo.

Adderley Smith Blues Band

His musical career advanced in 1968 when he joined the Adderley Smith Blues Band as a singer and harmonica player, and this is when he became more recognized as a musician.

Adderley Smith Blues Band, 1966.[3]

National Service

Between 1968 and 1970 the musical career had to temporarily abandoned, as Smith joined other 20-year-olds who were drafted into the army for their stint of National Service. He spent his time training at Holsworthy in New South Wales, but did not serve in Vietnam. Even here he kept his musical interests alive whenever he could and became acquainted with groups such as the Peter Nailler Jug Band and the Foreday Rider Blues Band, who followed a combination of folk and blues genres. During 1970 he completed his

[3] Adderley Smith Blues Band 1966 photo by Len Weigh.

obligations under the National Service Act and returned to normal life by joining the Sundown Country Band as a singer and songwriter. He parted company with that group when their musical directions changed.

The Seventies

In 1971 Smith joined the blues and boogie band Carson, with whom he recorded two albums. This band was popular enough that he was soon earning more from performing than from his day job, so he quit that and became a full-time musician.

Smith also toured with another legendary British blues player, John Mayall, and appeared at the Sunbury Rock Festival.

When Carson disbanded in 1973, Broderick Smith and Kerryn Tolhurst (a colleague from the days of the Adderley Smith Blues Band) formed the Dingoes with fellow musicians Chris Stockley, John Lee and John DuBois. Their musical style was a combination of rhythm and blues with Aussie bush music. The Dingoes subsequently became recognized as the epitome of good Aussie country rock and recorded a number of albums.

The Dingoes

The Dingoes in 2010. Back: Kevin Bennet, John Bois, Ashley Davies. Front: Chris Copping, Chris Stockley, Broderick Smith, Kerryn Tolhurst.[4]

In 1974 The Dingoes were achieving a high degree of popular acclaim. They were featured on the “Highlights of Sunbury 74” album and toured nationally with various artists including the likes of Bo Diddley, Leo Sayer, Bad Company, and Freddy Fender. Their musical energy and innovation earned them national recognition through the “Best Australian Group Album” at the Australian Music Awards, and the “Best Group Vocal Album” at the ARIA awards.

In 1976 The Dingoes took their biggest challenge by taking their music to the home of the blues - America. They had a recording contract with a company in Northern California, and for the next two years they were on the road performing in forty states from San Francisco on the west coast to Woodstock in upstate New York on the east coast. They recorded their own album there and briefly contributed to studio backings for recording artists such as Cat Stevens and Buffy Saint Marie. Then in 1978 some of their close colleagues in an accompanying band died in a plane crash, and the rest of the touring group decided it was time to come home.

The Eighties

When Broderick returned to Australia he formed the Broderick Smith's Big Combo. This band received very good publicity when they appeared at a public concert in support of the Peter McCallum cancer clinic, and the album of that perfor-mance achieved platinum sales figures. In 1981 Big Combo achieved more success and gold record sales with an album featuring several of Smith’s original compositions. However, the effort in keeping the group constantly on tour was too stressful for everyone, so the members called it quits in 1982.

Broderick then decided to concentrate on a solo career as a singer-songwriter and his first solo album was released in 1984. The inspiration for some of his lyrics is based on the experience of growing up and living in the western suburbs of Melbourne, so his St Albans history is not forgotten. His lyrics encompass such varied geographic icons as the Altona refineries and the Maribyrnong River at Green Gully, as well as more tender reference to emotional attachments between European and Vietnamese youth in Footscray. Such works are also a commentary of the social history of the times.

The Nineties

The 'nineties was a period of considerable diversification in Broderick's professional life as he extended his performance repertoire to include acting and teaching.

His acting CV includes performing with the Melbourne Theatre Company in The Grapes of Wrath, and television appearances in series such as Janus, Blue Heelers, Law of the Land, the Man from Snowy River, and State Coroner.

In 1996 he was recruited as an "Ambassador for the West" by the Western Region Economic Development Commission to help promote the west as a region for business development.

Apart from his solo albums, Smith's appearances over the last decade or so include touring Australia with Joe Cocker and appearing at music festivals throughout the country

[4] www.procolharum.com/copping_dingoes.htm

including Port Fairy, Tamworth, Canberra, Queenscliff, Tasmania, and others.

The New Millennium

Broderick's musical style is now called Country Rock with an Australian flavour. With a total of thirteen albums in his CV and six of these being solos, his contribution to the Australian music has undoubtedly been a long term commitment. He's frank enough to acknowledge that: "I'm at an age when I am really hoping to pass on anything I have learned in the hope someone will take advantage of it." To achieve this hope he's also gone back to the educational setting, but no longer as the student. He enjoys running workshops on songwriting, vocals, and playing the harmonica. These workshops have taken him all over Victoria, into community festivals, universities, schools, prisons, as well as music store outlets.

He signed with the Australian Broadcasting Commission to produce several albums, and the first two releases, "Songster" and "Crayon Angels", made it into the top ten albums of the year. His most recent release through the ABC is "Too Easy" which has been described as "Gentle acoustic country rock wrapped around contemporary lyrics in the Lawson tradition."

And that's not bad accolades for a British immigrant who spent his early teenage years in St Albans.

www.nucountry.com.au
Broderick Smith

2014 Update:

Broderick Smith is currently writing his auto-biography in conjunction with a journalist friend.

His official websites are :
http://www.myspace.com/brodericksmith
http://www.brodericksmith.com

Len Weigh's website is www.ellway.com.au

Les Thurgood: Royal Australian Navy Radio Operator, Chorister

My father was Garton Alfred Thurgood who was born in 1918 and came from Bishops Stortford in Herfordshire. He changed his name to Nevil for theatre purposes, so he's always been known in Australia as Nevil Thurgood. My mother was Eva Mary Hopper (but known as Mary) and came from Dorset; her mother was from Birmingham. I was born in Weymouth in 1943 and have three younger brothers: Peter, Derek, and Raymond. After the war dad decided he wanted to immigrate and he'd picked himself three places to consider: America, South Africa, and Australia. He took the third option of Australia, which for me was the best option. I don't think I could be an all-American boy and I would have been on the wrong side in South Africa, because I would have been on the side of Nelson Mandella.

Coming to St Albans

Dad came to Australia on his own in 1949 to find a place to settle and build a home. The problem with being an independent migrant was that he had to have suitable housing for the rest of the family before the Australian government would let them come over, because they were not eligible to be accommodated through the migrant hostels. Dad was at first boarding in St Kilda and working as a draftsman with John Thompson Australia, the boiler makers, and working as an actor with the National Theatre or the Union Theatre, which is now the Melbourne Theatre Company. He had his trade to earn a livelihood but he was also an actor for all of his life.

He nearly bought a house in Fern Tree Gulley, but it was too far from the school and the railway station. Then he found a block at North Balwyn, but it cost three hundred pounds and he would have had to build in brick, which he couldn't do himself and couldn't afford a builder. Then he heard about St Albans from a worker colleague and bought a block in Walmer Avenue for one hundred pounds. He liked the area because they had electrified the railway line from Sunshine, the land was cheap, and you could build a weatherboard house.

He obtained a loan from the Altona Co-operative Building Society and started building the house on the weekends, riding his bicycle from St Kilda. He mentioned that the road from Deer Park was very rough and often the wind would howl down making it a tough ride. But he was young and tough and if he had a performance scheduled he'd cycle back to South Yarra or wherever to put on the show. He's

written about the ninety stump holes that had to be dug for foundations and eighty-nine of them had solid rocks that had to be extracted. I think Alan and Clarice Quinn who were across the road helped with that and there was another chap two doors up, Les Stewart, who also helped. Dad obviously became friends with the neighbours. His mates from the cricket club and the theatre helped with the framing and plastering. The window frames and some of the roofing was made from car cases that he got off the wharf. The house was built as a complete house so we didn't go the way of a lot of the refugees who came from Europe who started off with a half house and then built the rest over time.

Thurgood home in Walmer Avenue, 1950s.

Mother

Mum came out with the children a couple of years after dad, when the home was ready for occupation. We left in November 1950 and arrived in January 1951 and moved into our new home on 2nd January 1951. Myself and my brothers were all born in England and I had my seventh birthday on the ship on the way out. We settled into 1 Walmer Avenue, which wasn't far from the primary school and just half a hop step and jump from the high school when it was built.

In those days mum was "just a housewife" … but she was better than that because she ended up being part of St Albans Little Theatre, was President of the Church of England Ladies' Guild, was Secretary of the High School's Parents' and Friends' Association, helped out in the tuck shop, and was District Commissioner for the cubs in the Sunshine area. We all joined the scouting movement and I went straight into scouts because I was older. My younger brothers started with the cubs before progressing. I don't remember much about the scouts, but I did learn Morse code and that probably sparked the interest in becoming a radio operator and therefore my joining the navy. My brothers joined the cubs and mum became an Akela with the cubs before becoming a District Commissioner for Sunshine.

Father

My father was a draftsman by trade for John Thompson Boilermakers; they were a British-based company and dad had applied for a job with them before he migrated. He initially worked as a draftsman but later became part of the management and was in charge of a department. He had good rapport with his boss whose daughter was also with the theatre. I'm not sure when he finished with them because he did private work in later life. He also worked on the stage as a writer, actor, producer and director and including some television work but I think the radio work was at the beginning before television came in. He also supported amateur theatre groups including Williamstown Little Theatre, St Albans Little Theatre, the Altona Players and the Castlemaine Musical Theatre. He was involved in the St Albans Little Theatre from the early fifties and the troupe performed as far afield as Williamstown, Melbourne and Frankston. Dorothy Baulch was another English immigrant who was involved in starting the St Albans group and she also had theatrical experience from overseas. Theatre shows were often used as fund-raisers for charities and local causes, such as establishing the local kindergarten.

Primary School

I went to the old primary school in West Esplanade and because we were quite close I would walk out the back fence and up the road and across the railway line to the school. It's a pity the original school building has been demolished because it had some good history to it. I was there from 1951 to the end of 1955. I enrolled in the St Albans High when it started in 1956 but at that time it was held in the church hall in Sunshine, which was the first year of its operation before they built the classrooms in Main Road East just up the road from us.

Les Thurgood receiving award at scout group, 1956.

I did the local paper round for a few years. That was afternoon work on the bicycle along Millawa, Walmer, Oberon and Vincent streets. There was an English couple named Ilott who lived in one of those old bungalows; they had a couple of boys younger then me who went to the

school. The family went back to England but the son Jim Ilott is now living in Perth. I've kept in touch with Jim and his parents all these years. I caught up with his brother when I was visiting relatives in Wales.

Secondary School

I've kept touch with only a handful of my high school colleagues, including Lana Bohudski, Vanda Viti, and Verners Pleiksna. We all went to the primary school and sang in the choir and became friends, then we did music and drama at the high school. Verners ended up in real estate in Perth and Vanda passed away a couple of years ago. Vambola Stanislavskis changed his name to Karl but I can't remember what happened to him. Andy Kratsis has retained a connection with the school for 60 years because of his involvement with the school council. Graham Stagg also lived in Walmer Avenue. I remember the Haynes' boys because their father was the caretaker at the high school but I've lost track of them.

I remember the school debutante ball in 1960 where I was Vejuna Kepalas's partner. The ball was held at the St Albans police youth club and everyone was formally attired: long white gowns and long white gloves for the girls, black bow ties and short white gloves for the boys, and Vejuna's gown was the fullest and fanciest and was made by her mother. The youth club hall was a very basic venue with its unlined corrugated iron walls but Lorna Cameron and her committee supported many clubs and activities. I must have liked Lorna because I used to talk to her a lot. She lived not far from us in Oberon Avenue and I would go past there on my newspaper round. I remember her two older sons were good footballers and became VFL players for North Melbourne.

I was made to play football at the high school though I was never a footballer – I used to be in the backline because I was never very good. I ended up playing tennis because I didn't like football or cricket. There were about seven of us in the boys' inter-school team and in my last year at the school we beat Drouin High School but lost all the other games. My only claim to sporting fame is that I was named as one of the best tennis players in the 1960 house sports competition (I was with Waratah) but all the other players in the inter-school competition team were also named as best players. The girls always played basketball before they split the game into basketball and netball. I remember Lana, Vanda and Vejuna were very good basketball players.

Drama

Doc Walsh was one of the teachers at the high school. Everybody loved him and he was a great one for promoting drama, having been the producer of the Electra Dramatic Group which was active around Footscray and Williamstown. They often went on tours. I was interested in drama and went on one of Doc's trips around different parts of Australia: Adelaide, Alice, Darwin, Isa and Townsville. Doc did that tour three years in a row. Peter Plain and Jeff Barlow were on the trip that I joined in 1958. I think Peter was living in Macedon in his later years but I'm not sure – when we first moved to Macedon in 1970 someone remembered him as being there. Lana Bohudski married Henri Malakunas and is also living in Macedon and has been there for a while.

Les Thurgood standing behind Mr Walsh, Electra Dramatic Group, 1958.

Joining the Navy

I went through to year eleven at the high school, because the classes did not go through to year twelve at the time. After that I joined the navy. Even when I was at school I wanted to join the navy. I think it was because I knew my Morse code from being in the scouts and I decided I wanted to be a radio operator and the navy was a way of doing that. So I applied at the recruiting centre in St Kilda Road near the junction and, surprisingly, the navy said yes. Normally they asked what you wanted to be but you were put somewhere else, but I ended up doing what I wanted to do. I spent a year training at Cerberus and in June 1962 I was in the Far East on the old aircraft carrier Melbourne. It was my first trip away since arriving in the country.

I joined the navy in January 1961 and the process was going through the usual two-month recruit school, learning discipline and procedures in the forces. Then I had to work

ship because there wasn't enough blokes to do a radio operator's course, so I had to work ship for three months until there was enough intake for us to do a communications course at Cerberus, which was for six months. In February 1962, I joined Melbourne down in Hobart and did that for two years. I volunteered to go to submarines when the navy decided we were going to have submarines. I went across to the UK in mid 1964 and was there for two and a half years. Then I decided I would drop back to the surface fleet … if you are not suited for submarines for whatever reason or are having problems with some of your colleagues it is just as easy to walk and go to back to the surface fleet. For me that occurred in 1967 and I served on various ships, mostly sea-going: I was on the Lonsdale at Port Melbourne for 18 months and had an 18 months posting in Singapore.

I was discharged in 1977 and got a job with the weather bureau. It was the same trade but not in Morse code as such. I was with the bureau until I took early retirement in 2004. I could retire early because I was eligible for a war service pension from the time I was in Vietnam. I was on the Parramatta which was an escort ship for the Sydney which took the troops to Vietnam; that was in 1971. I was twelve months on the Parramatta then on a little survey vessel based in Cairns for a year, and then got posted up to Singapore. I took retirement in 1977 after sixteen years and a bit in the navy.

My brothers Ray and Peter followed me into the navy in the same trade although Ray was a signalman rather than a radio operator. Peter did about 22 years with the navy. My other brother Derek also went in to become a radio operator but was only in for about two years. So we all ended up in the navy, for a while at least, and it probably goes back to the male line of the family that goes back to Danish-Viking times in England. Dad's father was in the Army Service Corps in World War One and was in the first lot going into France. On the other side, my mum's father joined the Royal Flying Corps before it split into the Royal Naval Service and the Royal Air Force; his father was a gunner for thirty years in the Royal Navy, so obviously there is a bit of tradition there as well. Mum's grandfather was a gunner in the Royal Navy 1870-1901.

Music

I enjoyed taking music at the high school, and that's probably why I've continued my involvement because I joined a choir after I left the navy. I joined the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Choir in February 1978 after having a beer with a couple of acquaintances at the old pub where the Alfred Hospital is; I think it was called the Chevron on the corner of Commercial Road. My acquaintances were in dinner suits so I said "What are you blokes doing in penguin suits?" and they said "Oh, we've just sung The Messiah." That was an annual event so they asked me to join. So I auditioned and have been with the choir ever since. I don't sing regularly with them at present but I am a life member. I've sung with the company that does Opera in the Alps and Opera in the Market and I've done all of those except for the first Opera in the Alps.

I regularly sing with an overseas choir and that means traveling overseas. The choir is based in Norway and is basically a Scandinavian group that became an international choir through one of the United Nations' children's section and it's still going. They usually do one international concert a year and do their own choirs in Scandinavia as well. I quite enjoy going away on these trips. During the five years when they became an international choir they did their concerts with Pavarotti. So the attraction was "Do you want to sing with Pavarotti?" I couldn't go the first time when it was in Verona in Italy because I couldn't get leave from work. At that stage I had already left the navy and was working at the head office of the weather bureau. Fortunately for me the choir came out to Australia and performed three concerts with Pavarotti; that was in 1994. So I've been singing with the choir since 1994. I can't join them every year because it's a matter of taking leave from work. I retired from work early in 2003 and I've been singing with them every year since 2004. It's great fun and gives you the opportunity to see places you might not ever get to, especially Europe. We did go the Egypt, and to Russia twice. We've been to Italy, Austria, Lithuania, and Latvia. Of course I take extra time off if I want to and go to neighbouring countries that I haven't been to.

I've just been to Hungary and took four days extra to go to the Netherlands. I went to Amsterdam for a revisit, because when I was training for submarines in England I took leave in Amsterdam and met up with a few service people: Americans, Canadian, Brits and another Aussie. So my recent trip has been the fiftieth anniversary, almost to the day, of my first trip. One of the American blokes came over and we made it a fiftieth reunion – just the two of us; we had a great time. I visited all the museums and whatnot, with all the Rembrandts, Vermeers, and a discreet tourist stroll through the red light district that Amsterdam is well known for. They still sell cannabis in some cafes and there is a marijuana museum, or herbal museum if you prefer to call it that: you can smell it wherever you walk in that part of Amsterdam. The Dutch are pretty tolerant about some things but have actually stamped down on the hard stuff.

It's probably surprising that I didn't take up acting after my father after I left high school when I joined the navy. I know a couple of my brothers might have done some TV work because of dad. That background must run in dad's family because his mother was an actress. We found out in recent years that one of our ancestors was at the court of Henry the Eighth as Master of the Revels, but we're not a hundred percent sure; possibly this is the source of our acting aspirations. My dad was a boy singer at St Paul's Cathedral in London, so the musical genes run along there somewhere and obviously I have inherited these.

Mount Macedon

We moved from St Albans to Mount Macedon in 1970. Dad was still involved in theatre work and there was an empty hall in Macedon so he started a theatre group and he started the Mountview Theatre that has been going for forty years. He started that company in 1972 with several other locals and they named themselves The Mount Players. Their first endeavour that year was to enter the One-Play festival at Kyneton and they've been performing ever since. They later gained access to an old church at Macedon and converted that into a theatre.

With a secure base for the group dad started writing plays and melodrama such as the Furtive Fortunes of Fickle Fate. Sadly, the theatre was destroyed in the Ash Wednesday bushfires of 1983. After years of hard work by members and lots of support from the community and the Gisborne Shire Council, the new Mountview Theatre opened its doors in 1990. Dad's photo is on the wall near the box office and mum's photo is next to him in costume because she did a couple of shows there as well.

We got burnt out in the bushfires of 1983. By the time we knew the fire was coming we couldn't get up or down the mountain to escape and ended up with a fire truck and a few other cars in the old Civil Defence College. We had no water so even if we'd stuck in the house there was no way we could have fought the fire. We were not directly in the fire front but all the smoldering aftermath and burning leaves were blowing about and that's what did it. Dad rebuilt. During this time we moved into the place next door, which used to be an old boarding house with two blokes living there. We ended up living in one of the rooms while the house was being rebuilt. Dad also had to rebuild the theatre down at Macedon, so it's been re-established. Dad's biography about his life in the theatre was published in 2006 as "The Furtive Fortunes of Fickle Fate, Being the Life's Journey of an Actor" which includes references to his appearance in local films and television series, but the story goes back to the seventies when he first wrote it up as a melodrama that has played over 500 performances. One of his earliest 'credits' was in the party scene of "On the Beach" by Nevil Shute. The film was shot locally in 1959/60 with international stars Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire, Gregory Peck and Anthony Perkins. Unfortunately several of dad's scenes ended up on the cutting room floor. He was told to wear a "party" tie for the party scene, so he chose one painted with salmon leaping out of the water, which intrigued everyone. Fred Astaire wanted to buy it, Gregory Peck wanted to know where he got it, and Ava Gardner wanted to know who'd painted it.

I've had a long connection with the Macedon theatre and go to shows when I can, so a few people might still recognise me because I look like my father. I see Lana Bohudski-Malakunas down there sometimes because she attends performances.

Overseas Choirs

I like the theatre though most of my involvement has been in singing. I was on stage at the state theatre in an opera as a supernumerary with the Kirov from St Petersburg – and we got paid for that show, two nights in a row. That was an experience. We were only on stage for ten minutes at the end of the opera but of course everything had to be done properly. We had to be a certain size because all the costumes came out from St Petersburg and therefore the participants had to fit into the costume and shoe sizes that were available. The costumes were not plastic: it was full, proper armor with metal breastplate, metal helmet and great big metal pikes. It was great treading the boards at the state theatre, even if it was as a supernumerary.

I have sung in St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh with a small choir from Melbourne, which was arranged through a friend of mine who is a solo singer. Every third or fourth year they tend to go overseas and join other choirs for a little festival. I've been overseas on two trips with CHIME, which is the Choral Institute of Melbourne, and we sang at the second festival at Montecatini Terme near Florence in Italy. Last year I sang in Italy with a choir from Scandinavia and we sang in the sixth festival there. This time we went and saw Pavarotti's family tomb near Modena. I have Pavarotti's autograph: we did his concert in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, so I have his autograph three times. In 1985 for the 150th anniversary of Victoria there was a big sing at the Royal Exhibition Buildings and then in 1988 there was the bi-centenary year; that involved about a thousand musicians and singers. I sung the Mahler Eight in there a few years back. It is an incredible place acoustically.

I've sung in some lovely places with the international festival for choirs: Graz in Austria, two concert halls in St Petersburg, the Tchaikovsky theatre in Moscow. It is good fun. I've been singing in the Festival of Voices in Hobart. I'm doing an event with the Melbourne Bach Choir in September then I'm going on a trip to the Galapagos Island and when I return I'm off to sing Messiah at the Manchester Cathedral. Plus I have a navy reunion in the meantime and an annual jazz convention. I like jazz and joined the Victorian Jazz Club through another navy friend whose parents were involved with the club.

Royal Connections

It's interesting when you are travelling how you can bump into the most interesting people. When I was doing my submarine training in England we went on the ship canal to Manchester. One of the actresses in Coronation Street was the pin-up on the boat and we got an invite to the studios, so we had Eileen Derbyshire who played Emily Bishop and Sandra Gough who played Irma Barlow showing us around the studio. Coronation Street was and still is a very popular show in England and Canada.

After I left the navy and was doing shift work with the weather bureau in Melbourne, the train service on this Bendigo line was not compatible and I don't drive so I had a flat in Queens Road. I had joined the RSL and was connected to the Melbourne and Footscray branches. The president there was with the arctic convoys and had become friends with Vera Lynn. One time when she was in Australia she came to the club on a Friday night. So we all mustered up and she sang us a few numbers and I was lucky enough to get her autograph. I was at the Cilla Black cocert at Dallas Brooks Hall and was one of three people that she chose from the audience and met her after the show - autograph included. R.I.P. Cilla. I've met Spike Milligan in the city quite unexpectedly. I must have been on watch on Australia Day and he was in Federation Square handing out saplings, so I thought I'd plant one of them at Mt Macedon. He scribbled his autograph for me which I appreciated because I always was a Goons fan.

I have never met the Queen but I've met Charlie three times and the Duke once. I was based at Singapore and one day I was coming down the stairs out of barracks and there was Prince Charles going to get his hair cut and looking for the barber's shop, so I showed him where our Chinese barber was. He does remember you, because I was in New Zealand on holidays and Charles and Diana were in Dunedin that day. I wanted to get a photograph of Diana but I was on the wrong side so I spoke to Prince Charles and he remembered me. Then I ran into him in Wellington a few days later and he said "Are you following me?" I met the Duke in 1997 just as I was getting out of the navy and was at Hobart when the Queen and Duke were there. I had taken a distant snapshot of the Duke and then put my camera down as they came nearer, as it's rude pointing a camera at them when they are close. The Duke came up and asked me about my camera so we had a nice chat.

So I've met the royalty of opera and popular song, a queen of soap opera, a comedian royale, and the royals themselves. What more can one say?

Update

My brother Ray died in a road accident 15 May 1988. Mum died on 5 October 2000 in Royal Melbourne Hospital just after having a pace maker fitted – very sudden and not expected. Peter died of cancer on 12 January 2002. Dad died in 2009 and it took me a while to sell his house, so I moved to Woodend and have been living here since May 2012. It's a nice setting and close to the railway station.

I'm still involved with the naval network in a way but it is an honorary position. I am the President of Melbourne subsection of the Naval Association and I'm also with the Submariners Association. My branch is the Communications Branch and we have the biggest membership of the various naval associations. We have regular reunions in different states and every third year there is a big reunion somewhere in Australia. I'm also an Association Member for the ships on which I've served. There's a naval reunion down in Frankston during September 2015 and I am going on a cruise to New Zealand in January 2016 with the Communications Branch, Victoria. That's how we keep in touch with one another. I'm singing "Messiah" in Manchester on 29 November 2015 and then I'm singing at Opera in the Alps in January 2016 and Opera in the Market in February, both with Greta Bradman and Teddy Tahu-Rhodes. Life is good.

Les Thurgood, 2015

Beverley Smith nee Toogood: Cleaning Contractor, Community Volunteer

I was born in 1942 and I remember growing up in Maidstone and going to St Johns Catholic School near the Footscray Hospital. My father was Peter James Toogood from Ballarat. My mother was Kathleen Betty Toogood and was originally from Maffra, but then her family came to Footscray.

Both my parents were working. My father's job was with Angliss, packing meat to send to the soldiers overseas. From that job he moved to the Housing Commission and worked for them for the next 50 years, putting in the walls in high rise buildings.

My mother worked in Smorgons for years and years and years. I think she was there for about 28 years. At first she was packing legs of lamb, and from there they put her in the sick bay, where she would assist the nurse. She never had a first aid certificate or anything, but I guess she would have learnt something from the nurses. They used to have a doctor who came around twice a week, and that was Dr Thomas from Maribyrnong. She ended up running the sick bay when they were short of nurses, because she'd be there months on end by herself. Most places had sick bays. Even St Albans High School had a nurse and a sick bay. That only went out about 16 years ago. Then they started employing bursars and registrars, so they'd get girls who had some first aid certificate and employ them.

Moving to St Albans

We moved to Beaver Street in St Albans in 1954, and I think that was because there was cheap land available to build your own home.

My father used to ride his bike from Maidstone every weekend to build the house in Beaver Street. There was an old guy who lived around the corner in Percy Street who was also building a house. Every weekend that my father came up there was a bit more timber missing, while this old guy kept building his home without any timber in sight. My dad used to say, "I think the old so-and-so has been pinching my timber."

It took dad years to build the house, so while he was building we lived in the three rooms at the back, like everybody else did, in a skillion.

Early Neighbourhood

When we first moved here there was nothing here. From where we were in Beaver Street there was nothing opposite us looking to the east; nothing at all. I could see from our front door right across to McIntyre Road because it was all paddocks. What's more I used to stand on the back porch and wave to my visitors on the train as they were going, because there was nothing more than a few houses in that direction.

There were only a few houses in Beaver Street. Keith Tully was one of the boys; he went to the tech school. Jeff Barlow was in our street, though we didn't have much contact with them. His sister, Glenda, joined the Navy.

There were some buildings along the south side of Main Road. Nearest the station there were two or three railway houses, then the old espresso bar which was back from the road, about where Daniella's is now located. That's where all the boys from The Untouchables used to hang out for their coffee. That was the gang back then, in the Georgie Biris days. They used to wear leather jackets with "The Untouchables" written on the back. They were harmless, but it was the era of the bodgies and the widgies.

After the espresso bar there was a house occupied by a Polish lady, and Dr Rogozinski ended up working in the back of that place before he opened up his surgery further along the road.

Then came the Gross's home, then the Hounslow's - there were about four of these very fancy looking homes. Then came the garage, which was where Safeways has their car park. That was a long time ago.

Meeting the Europeans

I remember when the Europeans started moving into the area. Mrs Babicz was across the road from us, and she had two girls, Maria and Stasia. Before they came we never had anything like panczki or Vienna bread. Because both their parents were at work, Maria and Stasia weren't allowed to come out of the house after school, so we would go over and talk to them through their front window. They'd say, "We'll give you panczki if you give us an Australian something." We'd swap through the window. My parents wouldn't have dreamt of buying a Vienna loaf.

St Albans Primary School

I was 10 years old when I came to St Albans and enrolled in the primary school. Because we came from the Catholic school they kept us back a year; they reckoned we were dodos. So I stayed back in Grade 5. We used to have assembly on a Monday morning and sing the national anthem. We used to meet our teachers at the station and walk to school with them. The suburban train always went through the northern side of the gates then, because that's where the platform was. I had Mr Monohan as my teacher, and I still remember him as plain as day: a big, tall man with glasses. I'd meet him at the station every morning and walk up to the school with him. Mr Proud was another teacher, who was from Sunshine. He was a really fine

looking man.

When we came here my younger brother Christopher was put into Grade 3. He was always in trouble with the principal up there. You used to see a diesel train maybe once week going up to Bendigo. My brother used to be a demon and get out of the school ground and sit in the middle of the railway tracks. They always had him in the office giving him the strap. He'd bring the letter home telling mum and dad that he'd got the strap again today. I don't know what his problem was, but he was a horror. When he got to the tech school he used to jump out of the two-storey building and disappear because he'd get into this argument with the teacher. He's mellowed with age, of course.

When I was in primary school there was a girl, Glen Stone, who lived in a house over the railway line near Station Road. There weren't many houses on that side of the railway line as it was nearly all paddocks. She'd say, "Do you want to come to my house?" I'd say, "Gosh, I've got to walk all that way." It's a long way now, but when it was all open paddocks you didn't notice it that much. We'd choof off up there and have a good time.

Furlong Road

There were no houses on the west side of the railway line between the St Albans station and Furlong Road. There was only one old shack, like Steptoe's shack, in the middle of a paddock and surrounded by a big fence. You could see it from the train as you were going past. They had one of every animal you could think of. They had horses, they had ducks, they had a cow, they had rabbits - they had everything. I remember those girls, Elaine and Denise Chester, because they were going to the primary school and I went to their place after school on several occasions. They also had an older brother. The family later moved to Braybrook.

At first the area along Furlong Road had been just empty paddocks because it was supposed to be a green belt. Then in the mid to late 'fifties a few houses started to be built there. That Furlong Road intersection with the railway line has always been a problem. When we first moved here, there was a man killed on that crossing as he was going home from work in his horse and cart when it got caught on the track.

Wittingslow Carnival

Our first carnival was put on by Tom and Des Wittingslow. Des was still young then, and he was a bit of a demon. When Mr Cameron asked Des to come to St Albans with his carnival he replied, "Where the bloody hell is St Albans?" The Wittingslows lived in Ascot Vale near the showgrounds. Mr Cameron said, "I reckon you could make a quid there, because there is nothing up there for the kids."

Des came here a couple of years in a row. The first year he was here he made his first thousand pounds. My brother is involved with the Wittingslow family because his partner is one of the Wittingslow sisters-in-law, so I know the family. Des said to me before he died, "I'll never forget St Albans, because I made my first thousand pounds there."

St Albans East carnival, 1957

The carnival was held where Quicks is on the corner. Then he moved to where KFL is on the corner of Alfrieda Street and Main Road East, which became known as the Coles Corner. There was no Coles there at the time, that was a paddock, and he used to hold the carnival there. He had a fashion parade on the back of his big tray truck. We all got done up like sore toes and thought we were Paris models. I got second prize in that one, and one of the Dobrowolski girls won first prize. It was funny when you think about it.

Behind the Tin Shed, which wasn't there at the time of course, there was an old shack out the back, an old corrugated iron shed. They used to have all sort of meetings there, even the Country Women's Association used to have their meetings there. European people used to live in one end of that, and I think the boy's name was Unick Polonczak and he went to the St Albans High School. There were about three houses in Princes Street behind that old shack. There was an old guy living there by the name of Cebisev. One day his German Shepherd went missing and could be heard barking from the other side of the railway line where the pub is now. There was nothing there at the time, no made roads or anything, but there was an old well there, and that's where they found the body of Stanislaus Kaska who was a buisnessman from Sunshine. The dog could smell the body that has been dumped in the well. They never did convict anyone for Kaska's murder.

St Albans High School

I went to St Albans East Primary in 1956. That was the year it opened and I was in Grade 6. Then in the following year, 1957, I went across to the High School when it started up in St

Albans. To start with, there were only the two buildings with the big, long corridor.

Mr Barker was the principal in 1957, and he lived in the old house on the corner of Millawa and Main Road. The school was strict about proper dress. You had to be in uniform all the time. In winter you had a jumper and the grey blazer with the emblem on the pocket and the motto "Truth is Our Light". We used to wear berets in the winter and sun hats in the summer. We had to have our socks rolled down to the ankles. I used to wear long socks and pull them up over my knees, and get pulled in for a strap nearly ever morning because I was naughty for not folding my socks down to the ankles. Kids don't know how good they have it these days.

Some of the high school students used to come from North Sunshine by bus - all the good-looking European boys when they first arrived.

We had sports groups named after different coloured flowers: there was Jacaranda, Wattle, Kurrajong, and Waratah. These were our sports teams, and each kid was put into a sports colour.

We had Doc Walsh as a teacher. All he ever talked about was football. The girls were all dodos about history and geography because he wanted to talk about the footy team. Needless to say, most of us girls failed these subjects.

Mr Reid took us for French. I never learnt any because I wagged too often. It was very handy living across the road from the school because you could sneak out and nobody could see you. Other girls would come and stay with me for the day, including the Dobrowolski girls. We used to enjoy making nice hot chippies. My mum and dad would be at work so they didn't know.

There's been a lot of change at the high school since my time there. In the late 'sixties they put the science wing on and then the assembly hall. Over the later years the three-storey library was put on. Originally down my side of the school there used to be a laneway between the school grounds and the homes on the western side. You used to be able to walk from Main Road along the laneway to Foxton Street and across to my place. It also went down along Beaver Street as far as the end of the school ground. Eventually, the school ended up with that land.

I remember when the cyclic maintenance went through and all the renovations started. They gutted the joint, and while they were doing the inside of the buildings they'd put everything into the old gymnasium. It was all locked up, nobody could get in there, but the things that went missing and the Drama filing cabinet went missing and that had all their plays from years ago, and all the MAC concerts, all that went missing.

Fun and Games

It was about 1956 that TV came in, and we got a TV early on. We started with just the three rooms, then dad built the big kitchen cum lounge room. The TV was on top of the fridge to save space.

Saturday night was a big night, because everybody would go down the street to get the newspaper. We'd tie a piece of string to an old purse and hide behind a tree or something and put the purse on the footpath. As people were passing by they'd stop to pick it up and we'd pull it away and they'd realise they'd been had. We did some stupid things. They all thought it was a circus.

St Albans People

Everybody knew everybody. There were a lot of European people, and you might not have known everybody's name but you knew the people. They'd say "Hi, how are you today?" It was a big night out, walking to where Ungers is now to buy the paper. Donny Martello had that shop for a while. When I worked there, there were Italian twins who were running it, then the Herricks, who were from Seaford. Mr Herrick ended up going back into the navy and then went down with the Sydney. It was sad.

St Albans Youth Club softball team affliiated with VAYC

Elsa Blahut was running a shop with a European colleague who lived around the corner from me. I always called him "Sonny Boy" and he always called me "Sonny Girl".

I remember Mr and Mrs Knowles. Their first shop was originally in Alfrieda Street; that was a clothing shop. It was roughly past the site of the State Bank. Then going up there were paddocks and another shop built later that was connected with the Footscray auction rooms. These guys would auction off furniture on the weekend. Up a bit further there was a big paddock with a tiny little skinny house. The Kassers used to live there. Annemaria Kasser was the woman's name. They were very flash looking people, very smartly dressed, very attractive looking people. They were very fair skinned people, almost like Austrians. The man, Albert, was a hairdresser, and he was always in a suit. Later, Eric Allan

opened a bicycle shop in the street. Once the Coles building went up, the Knowles had the shops next door in Main Road. They had the Adams Cake Shop there.

Tommy Straughen was a boy who had a disability; he was a character. The family lived in a big house in Walmer Avenue. Tommy really loved trains and he loved to play with his green flag and whistle. Mrs Straughen used to take him shopping to Footscray, which was the place many people went for an outing. One day Tommy put his head out the door of the old red rattler, waved his flag and blew his whistle, and the train headed off, because the driver thought the guardsman had given the all clear. Needless to say Tommy's mother had to take his flag and whistle away from him when he was on the station.

We've had a few famous or well known people come out of St Albans. We've had Broderick Smith, the singer. Muc the dentist is no dodo. Claude Calandra and Bela Ajayoglu are both doctors, and there have been others that have become university professors, such as Evelyn Hovenga, Sneja Gunew and Norbert Loeffler.

Dislike of Schooling

I was at the high school for three years but was probably really only there for one year, because I was wagging so often. I feel guilty about it now, but I hated school. I think the interest in being at school was knocked out of us after we transferred from the Catholic school at Maidstone. When we got here the closest Catholic school was in Sunshine. Funnily enough, the nun who signed us out at Maidstone was now in charge at Sunshine when we tried to transfer there, but we just couldn't get in because there was no room. There were a lot European migrants who were Catholics, including the Italians, and they were enrolling in the Catholic schools. It was a matter of timing - we should have registered much earlier, while we were still at Maidstone, but my parents didn't think about it then.

We tried to get into the Sacred Heart school that was opened and we couldn't get in. It took the sails out of us younger ones, me and my younger brother, but my older brother, Brian, was alright because he went straight to secondary school. My younger brother, Chris, was a demon. He eventually went to Sunshine Tech and was always in trouble, but he was in trouble in primary school anyway. Our setback was that Chris and I were both kept back a year when we went to the state school. I was put back into fifth grade and felt like a bit of a dodo.

St Albans Community Youth Club

I got involved with the Youth Club just after we arrived here, when I was about 12. The club building wasn't actually built then, but they had started the fundraising. It was a Police Boys Club then, which used to meet in the old shed up the back. The St Albans policeman said, "Let's get a club going for these boys because they've got to have something to do."

We had penny drives that used to start from corner of Collins Street and Main Road. They'd draw a line along the footpath close to the gutter along Main Road and then along Alfrieda Street to where Mrs Knowles' old shop was. People would come shopping on Saturday morning and put pennies on the line trying to fill it up all along the line.

We had bottle drives. The kids would get inside the back of a furniture truck, which had a long seat down either side. We'd all be in there and we'd go around to all the houses collecting bottles and sell them to the bottle-os. That is how we raised the money for here.

Social Activities

I was talking to my sister-in-law the other day. When she first came here she came from West Footscray. She got involved here because of the swimming. She was a state champion swimmer down at Footscray, and met the St Albans people because Lorna Cameron would take girls swimming there.

My sister-in-law would come on Wednesday night to St Albans for the dances. We'd have the girls on one side of the hall and the boys on the other. The first Wed-nesday of the month would be dancing, the following Wednesday it would be badminton or table tennis and that sort of stuff. She had her eye on my brother and another guy, the two best looking guys in the joint. She said, "I want to sit over there between those two," and goes over and does that. Well, all the other girls envied her because she had more guts than the rest of us. One night she won a raffle here, and the prize was a little live piglet. She had to borrow a dog collar to take the piglet home on the train. They didn't have a car then.

I had my 16th birthday here, which was a surprise party. Colin Thorpe came and escorted me to the party. Everyone sang "Sweet Sixteen".

We had social dances at the club, and we also did our Deb at the Youth Club, but that was through Keilor Council. Colin Thorpe also partnered me for that.

Sport Activities

We had gymnastics. We'd normally go by train as few people had cars. I remember Jack Cameron taking about all the football team in the

back of his station wagon. There were no seatbelts then, it was just get in or stay behind. They'd all pile into the station wagon and he'd take them to Sunshine to play football. We used to have this interclub sport activities with different youth clubs.

I remember being on the oval behind the Royal Melbourne Hospital and winning the high jump competition for the under-fifteens, because I was really good at high jumping back then. Back then I was pretty fit, but I can't jump over a fly now. I've still got that certificate.

Work History

After high school I worked at Coles for two years. That was in the days when cash registers didn't tell you how much change you had to give. There were big long counters and the people serving you were in the middle between two counters. Mrs McPherson, who lived in the third house up from the x-ray place, was one of the bosses there. She was a very smart lady.

When I was about 16, I worked at Ungers when it was a milk bar. It was mainly a milk bar and also had newspapers. Guys used to come in the morning on their way to the train and work. I used to heat tins of spaghetti in milkshake containers on the coffee machine by blowing steam through the spaghetti, and they'd have that for their breakfast. I was with Ungers for about two years.

After that I went into Smorgons Meatworks in Brooklyn, where I worked in the beef house. They used to have overhead chains going along from which the carcasses would be suspended. They'd kill the cattle up the other end and come along on chains where the guys would skin it and somebody else cut the head off, and so on. By the time it came to me at my desk near the weighbridge I'd write down the weight of the carcass.

I was there for 3 or 4 months and they asked me if I wanted to work for the office. They got me a little Vespa scooter, put a box on the back of it, and I would do all the banking, pick up all the shipping documents from the city, and go and pay wages out at Carlton where they were building units. It was interesting hooning around on a Vespa, but I wouldn't get on one now.

After that I did school cleaning. I worked at St Albans High part-time for four years then they redeployed me to Keilor Downs Secondary, and I was there for years. When Mr Kennet got in he got rid of all the cleaners and I started up my own little business. All the cleaning was going to be done by contractors, so it was either that or be without a job. I said to all the other girls who were cleaners up there: "Today is the last day to put in your letter of interest if you want to do it. Are you going to do it?" They said no. So I had a go at it and set myself up as a contractor. I ended up with five people working for me and ended up doing that for fifteen years. I finished up only two years ago, when the school got in other contractors.

Marriage

I married Ken Smith in 1972, and the wedding was at St Marks in Ascot Vale. Ken was from Maribyrnong but we stayed in St Albans after the marriage. We both worked for a living. Prior to the marriage I had been working in Smorgons, and when I had my son I was home for about 3 months and then was back at work, with a sitter in the street looking after the baby. I've worked all my life and after Ken and I married we both kept on working.

Surviving Serious Injury

I was working at the Maribyrnong Secondary College when I suffered third degree burns and nearly had my legs amputated. I was working there as a cleaner when it happened. Back then you had polish to put on the floors. It was the consistency of boot polish, which was soft but firm, though it was normally mopped onto the floors. I had been at the school only a couple of weeks and nobody had told me how to soften this stuff to put it on the floors, because they mopped it on. There was an incinerator to burn the papers and it was still warm. I thought this would be an easy way of melting a 20 litre drum of floor polish and get it nice and soft. I was holding the tin on the metal lid of the incinerator and the polish was starting to melt. Some guy came up behind me - this was 6:00 in the morning - and frightened the hell out of me. Not thinking, I jerked back, still holding the handle of the tin. The melted wax ran into the incinerator, ignited on the embers and went up just like petrol. I jerked back and the molten wax and the flames followed the tin and poured over my legs and feet. I was running around on fire with third degree burns and my flesh was burnt to the bone in a number of places.

At first they wanted to chop my leg off, but thank goodness it didn't come to that. I spent three months in intensive care at Footscray Hospital and can't remember too much of that, thankfully. There weren't any of these pressure suits to ease the pain or aid the healing. I had dozens and dozens of operations to put skin back onto the legs, because it was all burnt off. I was lucky to retain the legs. When I was first taken to the hospital one doctor wanted to amputate both legs. They told me afterwards that Dr Swan came in and said: "I think we should wait. Bill Wilson the plastic surgeon is back from America tomorrow. Let's clean her up tonight and get rid of all the dead flesh." They did that, and when Bill Wilson came in he said: "We'll have a bash at saving her legs. If needs

be we can always amputate them later." Thank goodness they didn't have to.

Voluntary Work

These days I'm retired, but I'm too young for the pension and they reckon my injuries are not enough to get a disability pension.

I'm still connected as a volunteer with the Youth Club, or the Tin Shed as it is known these days. I'd like to do more if I could stand long enough. My old injuries still cause a lot of pain. It's mostly my feet, because a lot of flesh was burnt off the toes and bottom of my feet, so when I stand or walk all the weight is on the bones. The skin on my feet breaks easily and I end up in hospital again for 4 weeks at a time because I pick up infections as soon as the skin breaks. You've got to put up with it and learn to live with it, because people are always worse off than yourself.


Bev Smith, 2005.

Note: Beverley Smith nee Toogood passed away in November 2017.

Tom Tscherepko: Bonegilla Tom

I came to Bonegilla in 1950 as a two-year-old and stayed there with my father for twelve years because he worked as a cook. In fact we stayed there until they kicked us out because they were gradually closing the place down. My father, Stepan, was born at the beginning of the first world war in the village of Starodub, Russia. He was conscripted into the Russian army for the second world war, but after the war he abandoned his machine gun, changed his name and walked to freedom. In Germany he said he was Ukrainian. Like many men in the Russian army he was worried about returning home for fear of reprisal against 'traitors', i.e. men who had surrendered rather than taking their own life in fighting the German army, and those who had fled as refugees. He knew that Stalin was executing his own people or sending them to forced labour camps in Siberia. My father ended up in Germany with lots of others in the work camps that had become refugee hostels. Here he met and married Daria, a Ukrainian woman with three children, but the daughter died; Viktor and Waldemar became my half-brothers. I was born on 23 June 1947 in Munich, Germany, and became part of the great mass of Displaced Persons who were looking for a new life.

My mother died unexpectedly in 1949 when I was only two years old, leaving father with the care of myself as a young child and the two stepsons, Victor and Wally, who were at least ten years older than me. We migrated to Australia, spending our first few months at the Migrant Reception and Training Centre in Bathurst before moving to Bonegilla in March 1950. My stepbrothers were sent to a boarding school in New South Wales not long after we came to Bonegilla.

My first memory of Australia is not a happy one. It was when I was a two-year-old and my father had taken me into town, where he'd had a couple of drinks and we were returning to the migrant hostel by taxi. My father started arguing with the taxi driver because the driver was taking the long way back - "going around in circles" was the way my father described it - presumably so he could charge a higher fare and dad wasn't

happy with that. The driver then stopped and got a big shifter out of the boot and was threatening to use it. I got scared and started screaming and crying, which somehow calmed the situation down because they both could see the effect it was having on me. But most of my memories are good ones.

But growing up in the area you get to love it, so my early years there and my close association with my father are all positive memories. I remember the enjoyment of the outdoors as I grew older: I went swimming, fishing, and there were rabbits everywhere. Having a bicycle I grew adventurous and explored as much as I could. I got to know the lake, the weir, Albury, Wodonga and Bonegilla. I had my own rabbit farm. I had dogs and a ferret. After a while you got get sick and tired of eating mutton so rabbit was a welcome change. People would go rabbit hunting and come back with a heap of them strung over a long pole. You could always sell your extra catch to some willing customers.

People would have their gardens on the hillside and you would help yourself to a couple of tomatoes or a water melon – they didn't care. People used to pay me to pick mushrooms, because I knew the right ones to pick. I still do. When I was hanging around with these two older guys, we found these little valleys that we called Little Valley and Big Valley, where we discovered fool's gold. Everything was a way of making a quid so it was thruppence for me to take you to Little Valley and sixpence for Big Valley and the opportunity to find your own traces of gold. I found this old abandoned farmhouse that was miles and miles away and still had all these fruit trees. I would go there in season and there would be these lovely peaches and yellow plums and other fruit. When the Hume Weir was down you could catch freshwater crayfish. I'd come home with four of them and my dad couldn't believe it. I'd catch redfin and bring them home for dad to cook up a lovely fish dinner.

I went to Glenn Innes every year because I had two stepbrothers who went to boarding school there. The government had sent them there. Glenn Innes is near Tamworth. I liked going there as a kid during the school holidays and my dad probably also loved it when I went because he could have a bit of peace and quiet as well as enjoying a drink. He had a good time and I had a good time with my brother Wally. Wally ended up getting a job in the dry cleaners and then he leased the business and ran it. Victor ended up working as a butcher in Darwin. He also ended up a pisspot and died quite young, in his fifties. Victor had come back to Bonegilla in 1961 at the time of the riots and became friends with one of the coppers. I'd got myself into a bit of trouble at the time and my brother banged on the door late one night yelling "Police!" in order to give me scare. It certainly worked.

I was hanging around with Stefan Klepiak at the time and he was a bit of a terror and became known as "the Bonegilla Kid" because he was always getting into trouble and coming to the attention of the police and court magistrates. His mother was German and his father was Polish and a pretty tough guy. Gerald "Hocko" Hochheimer was another of Stefan's friends. They were older than me and would often get up to mischief, which probably influenced me as I was pretty cheeky at times.

I saw my brother Wally less often and one day there was a handsome young man about 18 years of age getting off the bus stop while I was marching around playing a soldier. He asked me would I know the Tscherepko family and I said "I am the Tscherepko family." He said "I'm your brother." Straight away I said "What did you buy me?" He'd got me a toy gun and I was so impressed. He'd come there to tell us about his engagement to a girl he'd met at Glenn Innes.

My father began his working life in Australia as a labourer in the wood yard until he was offered a job as a kitchen hand in Block 14.

From there he was able to work his way up to the position of Chef in the Hospital Block, which was a permanent position. After twelve years at Bonegilla, my father and I moved to Melbourne. It was the end of an era because the hostel was my home and moving out was like leaving my childhood behind, which I was doing anyway because I was now a teenager ready to move onto bigger and better things. Dad's best mate at Bonegilla had been Ivan Koliba, who was the shoe repairer there. If you ever see that classic Bonegilla postcard of an unidentified cobbler with a young girl, that's Ivan Koliba and his daughter, Daria; they were in Block 14. The Kolibas moved to St Albans, so when my father left Bonegilla I came and stayed with them.

Stefan Tscherepko and colleagues, Bonegilla, 1950s.

Starting School

Going to school was a funny introduction to a new stage of Australian life. I'm Russian Orthodox by religion but that changed once I went to Mitta Junction state school. Mr. Brodie

was a Catholic and when he was enrolling me in the school he asked me: “What are you, Church of England or Catholic?” I said I was Russian Orthodox. He said “You’re Catholic.” I said my name was Anatolij. He said “Your name is Tom.”

I was there since grade one or bubs, and Mr. Brodie wanted me to go to Christian Brothers. He knew my dad liked a beer and that I didn’t have a mother, so he wanted me to go to the Christian Brother’s college, St Tomas Aquinas, but I discovered that all you do there is pray. I met Tony Flannigan there and we had a fight and then became best of mates and got into a few scrapes together. He had a brother and stepfather in Wodonga who was a headmaster. He worked in the tuck shop at the school which was handy for me because I got a few perks.

I believe the most lasting legacy that the primary school gave me was a name that has stayed with me ever since, because “Bonegilla Tom” is still an identity that I relate to. Decades later when the 50th anniversary of the migrant camp was being celebrated I was invited as a guest speaker and panel member for events in Albury and at the Immigration museum in Melbourne. People wanted connections with the Bonegilla experience and I was able to provide some.

Christmas festivities at Bonegilla, 1950s.

In Bonegilla when I was growing up there was this beautiful hall. Danko Martek was an artist and painted a mock Tudor setting in the recreation building that later became known as Tudor Hall. This was for the visit by Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh in 1954. Martek also did the decoration at the Benalla railway station. He was a patrolman at Bonegilla and his artwork and decorations were done in his spare time. In the Olympics year 1956 he had a lot of work. I used to go there because he said I was like his second son. Every year when the Wodonga festival was on he did a lot of the paintings and dressed up as a Viking and I was his little Viking kid. He made the costumes himself. At Christmas time when he was delivering the toys and things from his van and I gave out the little toys and ice creams. I ate that many ice creams ... It was an exciting time for a young lad and Martek was my hero because he made me part of all the excitement. They were good times. Martek was an interesting person and such a talented artist. He ended up working for The ABC in Melbourne as an art designer, I think, and he also reconditioned a lot of the artwork at Luna Park. He loved his glass of scotch and listening to classical music. He lived next to the recreation hall where he was in charge of the library and entertainment. I never had to pay to get into the movies because I had a key to get in if he wasn’t there to let me in. He had a little office upstairs and sometimes if I called in and could hear a bit of Tchaikovsky from upstairs I suspected he might be painting a pretty lady’s portrait. He married a Russian lady. I was at the movies several times a week since I was six years old. He gave me all the movie posters as mementos but in the end I had so many of them that my dad threw them away.

I remember that there were two riots at the camp when I was there, one in 1952, and another in 1961 towards the end of out time there. The 1952 incident was stopped very quickly when the army brought out tanks. A couple of tanks and that was the end of it - it quietened down just like that. The riot police were called in for the 1961 incident. The big problem was that people were expecting to be given jobs but there were no jobs available at the time so after two years of waiting they were not very happy and prepared to show it. I rode my bike down there sticky-nosing around during the demonstration and I got a belt across the backside from a copper for my trouble. It hurt, too.

At that time we were living in the hospital block, which was the best block in the camp. There were big verandahs and that’s from where I was watching when I went sticky-nosing to see what was happening. They had about 200 riot police in busses and they raided a number of rooms looking for weapons.

I was there when the Hungarian refugees started coming after the Hungarian revolution in 1956. I remember that a few families died tragically because of accidental gas poisoning from briquette heaters. The barracks were very cold because they were just unlined corrugated iron and the rooms had no heaters so they were very cold. People devised their own methods of heating and some of these were quite dangerous. We had a little electric radiator.

The first Bonegilla Scout group was started by Constable Alf Besford, who was the policeman at Bonegilla at the time. I believe he started that in 1959, so I would have been about 12 when I joined. The memories I have are all fond ones. I was taught how to tie knots and still use them today - the bowline, reef knot etc. We were taught first aid and how to treat snake

bites. We went on camping trips along the Murray and Kiewa rivers and learnt survival skills like catching rabbits, cooking damper and building overnight shelters. The Scout leaders taught us about honesty, politeness and having respect for other people. I remember finding a wallet and handing it in to the Mr. Besford, who was our scout master, and receiving a reward of ten shillings. I took all my mates to the Bonegilla canteen and bought us all lollies and ice cream until we had it coming out of our ears, and I still had change left.

We'd organise 'Bob a Job' drives to earn some money for the Scout group to buy tents and camping gear. We did all sorts of odd jobs for people we knew and I found I was good at making money back then - and still know how to make it today! I still remember some of the names from that scout pack: Lindsay, Stefan, Gerald, Felix, Bogdan, Rinehart and Peter. There were others and they are part of my good times and memories of growing up in Bonegilla.

Paul Crowe was a teacher at Bonegilla who had played for the Wodonga football club and was coaching a football team at the migrant centre school. He would tell the story how the Bonegilla boys lost their first ever game of Aussie Rules against the Wodonga team, partly because they only had gumboots or sandals for footwear and mainly because they played the game as if it was a soccer match.

Colonel Henry Guinn was in charge of Bonegilla. It had originally been an army camp so I suppose it was natural that the army or former army officers should continue to control the premises. I got to know his daughter, Caroline, because she went to the same school.

Stefan Klepiak was another of the boys who came in the fifties; he was of German background. He wrote up his escapades in the book "The Bonegilla Kid." He was older than me and on occasions I tagged along him and his mates because they were always up to something.

The Rapsey family had a farm near the hostel and that farm was called Bonegilla Park so perhaps the area or the army base was named after the farm. The son, Lindsay Rapsey, and some of the other local boys joined the Bonegilla scout group, so we did have some Australian members in our group of mixed European heritage. Lindsay's mother, Stella Rapsey, was the district commissioner for the Girl Guides. I worked occasionally on the Rapsey farm as a teenager and I loved the foods they dished up such as fresh scones for morning tea and roast lamb for dinner.

Leaving Bonegilla

I loved Bonegilla. I would still be there now except they kicked us out. When my father left Bonegilla he continued working as a chef for the Immigration department and these were generally live-in positions. His first job after Bonegilla was at an old hostel for English migrants that was next to the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne. There was a big fenced off area and it was an English migrant hostel. He was still friends with Bill Dunne from Immigration so I guess he would hear about opportunities. I used to go there to visit him and he would give a matchbox full of thruppences because he'd keep them for me.

From there he became the chef at Caulfield grammar near Elsternwick and worked there for a fair few years. Then a position came up at Shenton House in Hawthorn, where he became the caretaker and chef. This was another type of hostel but it was more like a motel with self-contained units. It was an old mansion in Kinkora Road with beautiful trees and a tennis court. It was used as a residence for doctors visiting from England. My dad ran the kitchen and would cook meals for the residents and there was a maid to help. I went there to visit when I was married with the kids and he would always make us a beautiful meal. Sometimes there were no residents so he wouldn't have anything to do apart from cooking for himself and the maid, and she would wash up. At lunchtime he would go to the Glenferrie Hotel and have two pots. Here he became friends with Mr. Valentine, a Hungarian artist who lived across the road. They called him Doctor Valentine. I don't know what happened to him.

People loved my dad because he was a happy, singing man. He was very sociable and wasn't shy in meeting any visiting dignitaries. Occasionally senior immigration department staff or politicians would inspect the various hostels around Melbourne, and one of the latter who came to Shenton in the early seventies was Phillip Lynch, who was the Minister of Immigration. Walter Jona became friends with my dad; they used to have a drink together.

Coming to St Albans

I was in Glenn Innes visiting my brother at the time when my dad was told he had to leave Bonegilla because they were gradually closing the place. My father rang Glenn Innes and told my brother to bring me to the Kolibas at St Albans. In preparing for our departure he threw out all my junk, including my comics and posters. If you had them today you could make a fortune selling them to collectors.

I came to St Albans when I was 14 or 15 and went to the high school in form three. That was probably about 1961 or '62. I was only there for about six months. One of the teachers was picking on me because of my hair style and because I was always out of uniform. I had slip-on Italian suede shoes that I had found in a car and my trousers were not the usual school ones

but tailored ones from Hamptons. Mr. Torpey was the headmaster and was also interested in maths, but Mr. Pavlov was the best – if he knew you were interested in mathematics he'd pay attention to you. Mr. Torpey said "You need to get a haircut and why aren't you wearing black shoes?" So I told him that I was on my own because my mother had died when I was a baby and my father was living away – all the hardship stories – of course I knew all the right arguments by then – and he told me not to worry about it. He gave 10 shillings to get a haircut and Bob Koliba gave me a short back and sides and we used the money to buy chocolates and cigarettes.

At that time I was making little rings out of bolt nuts. Marzie Roszak, who was a little bit older, was working at the chroming place. I would make rings with little hearts and things like that and Marzie would chrome plate them for me at work and I was selling them at school. Everywhere I went I had a little file and I was working on the rings. Some people thought I was making knuckle dusters but I was only making individually-crafted fashion accessories.

The problem with being at the high school was that I was at that stage where I didn't want to conform to the dress and behaviour codes. I liked to dress in more style than the school uniform and having grown up with a lot of freedom I didn't like to be told what to do or how to do it.

Bikies, Bodgies and Sharpies

First I was a bikie but I got sick of the bikies and became a bodgie. Then I became a sharpie. That was the era of the long hair and the sharpie walk. Do you remember that? It was more of a shuffle but you had to do it proper. I was barred from the Mariana Hall because of the way I dressed and walked. You had to wear the hand-made shoes by Kosmano of Collingood. Later when I was living with Eddie Sterling in Vule Street I didn't even have a cupboard but I had lots of shoes and clothes. My room had no cupboards and no nothing except a nail where I would hang my clothes and I must have had about fifteen pairs of shoes so they would be lying around on the floor.

I got sick of school and went looking for a job with Jimmy Jarosinski. Jimmy was a year older than me and already working but he wanted to change and we went to a few places looking for work in the factories. In Sunshine about Third Avenue on the way to the Tottenham Hotel there was a place called National Springs. Down that street was Plant Handling Equipment and the boss there was a tall Pommy guy who had been an officer in the British Army. It was a welding and press shop and Jimmy had welding experience but I didn't. Jimmy said he couldn't start straight away because he had to give a week's notice but I said I could start immediately. I had just turned 15 but I told them I was 18. Anyway, they put me on the guillotine and with lots of overtime I was earning about £8 per week, which was quite good money for a young lad like myself. About two weeks later my father rang to see how I was going at school and they told him I was no longer at school. He wasn't happy with me because he was paying board to the Kolibas but seeing I wasn't at school he said I could pay my own board from now on.

I felt a bit guilty after a while because I was working hard but they were treating me well and I thought I would get caught out. I went to my boss, Mr. Thornley, and told him I wasn't 18 but would be turning 16 in two month's time. He said, "For being honest I'm going to give you a one pound rise and send you to technical school to become a sheetmetal worker." He'd stay behind and teach me how to use the micrometer and calibrate the machines. When I turned 17, I was foreman of the press and guillotine workshop.

Staying with the Kolibas

When my father and I left Bonegilla he continued working as a chef and these were generally live-in positions. His first job after Bonegilla was at an old hostel for English migrants that was next to the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne. I went and stayed with the Koliba family who had moved to St Albans in the 1950s.

My dad never came to live in St Albans but he would come and visit me at the Kolibas. Even when I was working in the factory in Sunshine my dad used to come from Hawthorn and bank my pay for me. I still get tears thinking about him, because he was my dad, my mum, and my best mate. I still go to the cemetery to visit his grave. My father ended up buying a block of land in Warrick Road North Sunshine with some money that he and I had scraped together and I ended up inheriting that block of land.

When I was about 18, I remember dad drinking with people like Ivan Koliba and the Hercelinskyjs. We knew the Kolibas because they were also in Bonegilla; the children were Bob, Daria and Christina, and they lived in Elizabeth Street. There were also Kolibas from Ardeer who attended the high school. Biskupski lived on the corner of Kate street, because when I came to holidays I would automatically hang around with Biskupski. He married Teresa Layden; they were further up from the corner in the brick house.

Then the company I was working for brought in the pallet racking from Canada. My mates were outside putting it all together while I was inside the factory, so I asked Mr. Thornley if I could also work on the shelving construction. At first he wanted me to continue where I was then agreed and eventually put me in charge of interstate installations. So I went all over

Australia installing shelving. At that time they were doing the shelving for Coles New World supermarkets. I had two installations in New South Wales: one in Penrith and the other in Orange. I went by train to Sydney, caught the train to Penrith and did that job, and then caught a plane to Orange. It was winter and freezing so I wanted to get the job finished as quickly as possible. I was on my own and as far as getting a team of workers I was told to go to the local pub and recruit men there. There were two semi-trailer loads of shelving and I installed that pretty much on my own and the company was really pleased because the job was finished quickly. I booked a lot of overtime on that job but also got paid good bonuses so we were all happy. Mind you there were other times when I let the company down by not turning up for work after I'd had a night of drinking. I left work a few times and they always accepted me back. Now it's happening to me and I'm wondering why don't these young men turn up for work like they're supposed to? It's Karma. Kingfishers bought us out and after them it was Boral Cyclone. Old Archie was a Scottish guy who was a manager in the company and he was like a second father to me and every year for Christmas I bought him a bottle of something special. Old Archie lived and died in Croydon. He was a great manager and a great guy.

Remembering Bonegilla

People mentioned my name in connection with Bonegilla because we had been there 12 years and had become institutionalised. I didn't think there was anything wrong with that.

In 2000 the Albury Museum, sponsored an exhibition for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the migrant reception centre I was asked to become part of the official opening of the show that went around Australia. It was a touring exhibition that was called "From the Steps of Bonegilla." They published a little book about it. At the reunion I caught up with people who I hadn't seen in many years, including Caroline Guinn, Ted Egan and John Duncan, who had been high up in the camp hierarchy. Carolyn Guinn – her married name was Steadman - was the daughter of Colonel Guinn who had been the director of the camp from the mid fifties to the mid sixties.

In 2001 there was a Bonegilla Reunion Day organised by the Immigration Museum and I came across Paul Crowe, my former primary school teacher was also there with his wife, Margaret. We were on the same forum panel talking on the theme "What's your story" which was organised by the SBS Front Up television program.

In 2001 I also gave a talk to a staff seminar for the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne. That was held at the Veneto Club in Bulleen and was part of the Federation centenary celebrations. They asked me to talk about my Bonegilla experience as a contribution to "immigration perspectives in exploring Australian history and culture." It was like an in-service training for their staff.

That year I also lent my photo album to the state library so that they could make copies for their collection and link them to the Immigration Museum's Bonegilla Hostel archive.

Much closer to home, in 2003 I was guest speaker for the Association of Ukrainians, St Albans, for a discussion and a BBQ at their hall in Alexina Street. This event was sponsored by the Victorian Multicultural Commission. Ukrainian immigrants were some of the early arrivals in St Albans after the war and they organised themselves pretty quickly. They bought a block of land on the corner of Alexina and Arthur streets in 1953 or 1954 and built clubrooms for social activities. It's still there, though the church and the main community centre is in Essendon.

Horse Racing

My father was a little gambler because he'd put 50 cents on the double whereas he always said I as a durak [idiot] because if I made a bit of money I didn't know how to keep it. Even as a lad in the camp I always spent whatever money came my way. I loved buying records and things. When I was working and cashed up and visiting my brother in Glen Innes I would go dressed up in good suits and shoes. You can't get that quality in a country town so I often left good clothing for him. I used to go to Collins Street to buy it. I wanted to have nice things rather than money in a bank doing nothing. Mr. Koliba also loved to have a bet and, just like my father, it was a little bet. My brother was a big gambler and worked for a bookmaker and SP, and that's how I started.

The first horse I bet on was Mister Lou. I bet £5 pounds and won £50. Peter Bakos was the jockey; a little Hungarian immigrant. That win got me hooked and the fascination grew. How I started buying racehorses was back in 1995. Fred, my German neighbour, was selling his house and he had it on the market for 6 months and hadn't sold it, so I said to him if I get this job I'll buy your house. By that time I was working as an independent shelving contractor and I'd quoted $100,000 for a big job installing shelving in Bourke Street so I was expecting some money. Would you believe the house sold before I got my money? That's how I ended up with money to buy a racehorse.

The next house I wanted to buy my friend Sloko talked me out of it. There was three properties near the Anglican Church in East Esplanade that I could have bought, but I didn't and that's history. I could have built lots of units there between the church and the alleyway. For a while I was trying to get Sloko interested in the

horses. He would come with me to the tracks and the stables but he never took it up seriously. He found it exciting to be up there at 4 in the morning and see the jockeys and the trainers working. We'd be walking down there in the half-light and people would be asking "How are you Bonna?" because they knew me as Bonegilla Tom. It is exciting when the jockey comes back and says "I think it will win" because that's as close as you will ever really get to the horse's mouth.

Super Shaquille was my first horse, first starter to win three in town. I always said to Nick, my Ukrainian mate from West Footscray, that one day I'm going to win a race with my own horse at Flemington. We used to meet on a Saturday morning at the Royal, have a couple of pots, and then catch a taxi to Moonee Valley or Caulfield or wherever we were going that day. Nick is a businessman who now lives in Canada, leading quite a good life. He worked at Moreland's Real Estate. He met a girl from Canada and got into real estate over there; been retired for years, has a yacht, drives the best cars. I sent him a photo of my horse winning at Flemington to prove I had done it. I always said I was the poorest of owners, a battler from St Albans, but at least I beat some of the millionaires.

I've had horses win at Flemington, Sandown, Moonee Valley Caulfield and even Sydney. So I achieved my ambition with the horses, but I know you can't win money – it's a fluke. I owned my horses outright which meant I didn't have to argue with other part owners. These days I have a betting splurge now and again, but I treat it as a business which means I will take some risks but not stupid ones. These days I'm happy if I walk out without losing money, but often enough I win, so it's still a good experience. The more I win the more I bet, so I know you can end up losing a lot, which I have done. If I'd put all my betting money into real estate I'd have a lot of real estate by now. These days I put some money into shares; they go up and down but at least you don't lose all your money.

Super Shaquille won at Sandown and Moonee Valley the year that Doriemus won the Melbourne Cup [1995]. But they still got all my winnings back, because of course before long I ended betting all that money. I named my first racehorse "Bonegilla Tom" because of my good memories of the place and then discovered that many punters responded positively to the name. I guess they also had some good memories to recall. I bought that horse for $60,000 as a yearling, raced it for a time locally, and ended up selling it to America where it also won some races. It was doing well here and was a good earner, having won a race at Caulfield [1997] and coming second in several other races. It won prize money of about $95,000, which wasn't too bad for a five-year-old. It could have won a lot more except for the bleeding from the nostrils after racing. Unfortunately for me the horse was banned for life after a couple of such bleeding incidents. That's why it was sold to America, because over there they could treat the bleeding with a drug that was listed as illegal over here. It put in a good performance at Hollywood Park at 33 to 1, which was pleasing to hear.

Cinderella Cafe was another of my racers. I thought there were excellent possibilities with her because she was sired by Beau Zam, who had been a prolific winner. She was only a tiny horse and though she started well she didn't go on. There's a bit of a story behind the name.

The Cinderella Cafe

When my father and I were at Bonegilla he would say he had some business he had to attend to in Wodonga. I was just a young lad at the time but I've always remembered the café that dad took me to, usually on a Saturday, when he went into town to settle his business deals, at a place called the Cinderella Café. I never really understood what these discussions were about, but that didn't worry me, because while he was at his meeting I would be looked after by the waitresses at the cafe, who would give me a glass of lemonade and kept me company until dad returned. I really enjoyed those outings because everyone was so friendly and I always looked forward to that glass of lemonade as a special treat. All that stopped when we moved away from Wodonga and for a while I really missed these little excursions into town.

Many years after dad passed away I was reminiscing about those nice memories and during some holidays I decided to visit Bonegilla to recapture a sense of those early days. The Bonegilla Reunion Festival was held in 1997 to celebrate the Reception Centre's 50th anniversary, and that was good enough as an excuse for me to go there as well.

Naturally enough, over those 50 years Wodonga had grown and neighbourhoods merged, so that nothing at all was familiar to me. I walked around the streets but couldn't find any sign of a Cinderella Café and even checking in the phone books wasn't a help. Nobody on the streets had heard of it, so it must have closed down a long time ago. In the end I decided to have one more try at the local pub, on the theory that pubs always have an old codger or two willing to reminisce about the good old days. Anyway, I did find an older guy having a beer and he seemed willing enough for me to start up a conversation. When I asked him if he'd ever been to the Cinderella Café, he looked at me rather oddly and asked why I wanted to know. So I explained how I had been there as a young lad with my father and was looking forward to

another lemonade for old time's sake.

He just smiled and said it wasn't so much a café as a house of ill repute.

Jack Eastgate

With regard to the horses, I became good friends with Jack Eastgate, who owned Beau Zam in partnership with Bart Cummings. Eastgate was a multi-millionaire and was the first person to win $2 million in stake money, plus he sold the horse for $5 million. His family was Eastgate Cabinets, and he said that after the war they were only making sixpence profit on each cabinet, but a million times that is a lot of money, as he told me. Jack's wife was from Scotland and her family owned one of the big whiskey distilleries. Eastgate had a stud farm up in Monegeeta.

How we became friends is that we were with the same horse trainer, Johnny Maher. When my horse Super Shaquille was on his second start at Sandown I went there to put some money on him because I knew he would win. When I saw the odds shortening unexpectedly I knew someone else was betting heavily and unfortunately I didn't get the best odds. Jack was a big punter and had a horse in the previous race and he usually followed the stable for potential winners, so he had backed my horse purely on speculation. We both made money on that race but I didn't make as much money as I could have if there were better odds. Naturally I made some inquiries but no one admitted passing on any tips to outsiders. A few weeks later Jack's horse was running at Moonee Valley as was mine and I saw Jack dressed up in a nice suit. He came up to me and said "Son, I can look you in the eye and say I did not back your horse. But you are invited to my farm any time you are out that way." I later said to Johnny Maher, the trainer, "Anyone who could look me in the face and say what he did is a bloody good liar," because he had backed it.

Anyway, we became really good friends. Beau Zam won eighteen of his starts so was a fantastic horse. Eastgate sold it to Japan for $5m in the eighties; that was a lot of money. He had this 200-acre farm with horses at Monegeeta. When I first went there his second wife, Elizabeth, was very nice in making me a welcome. It turns out her family was behind Grants Whiskey in Scotland. They were multi-millionaires but they were both very down to earth. Eastgate met the Queen in Canberra when Beau Zam beat Bonecrusher in the Queen Elizabeth II Bicentennial Stakes [8 May 1988]. He had lots of trophies because he had a long history of horse racing. He loved a bit of repartee in connection with the horses and we had fun at the races because of that. He often called me 'son' when we were talking and when we went to places like Ballarat he would sign me into the members' area as his son. If I wanted to stir him up a bit I'd respond by asking "Can you lend me ten grand, Dad?" If I'd taken my jokes a bit too far or they were too obscure he'd pause and say: "Are you taking the Mickey?"

Jack had a lot of property investments which he had accumulated after the war. He also had the family furniture business, so he died a winner. I would visit him in hospital when he was ailing and I'd also visit his wife who was being treated for cancer. I also went to his funeral, and have missed his friendship and company ever since.

2013

I've been in my current home in St Albans for the past 30 years. Fred Drillich used to live next door and we'd have a cup of tea together. We'd been neighbours for twenty years and then I discovered that he'd been the supervisor of Block 19 in Bonegilla when I was just a little kid. To think that I used to get on the bike and tease him because he was a supervisor. Isn't it funny that we'd been neighbours for 20 years and didn't recognise that we'd been in the same hostel so many years earlier?

I still bet on the horses and have a big bet every now and again. You can win a fair amount but you can be a bit greedy. You win something and think you will repeat it but you can lose it just as quickly. These days I put some of the winnings into shares, which is less risky if you are careful. You can't make real money out of horses unless you are very lucky or very rich. I know because I tried. I had seven horses and six winners. I named one of my horses "Bonegilla Tom" and found that a lot of punters backed it because they could relate to the name. Another one I named "Cinderella Cafe" but not too many people would have known what I was referring to.

This old Ukrainian or Polish lady said to me that I would have a very long life. I've always been lucky because I could have got into a lot of trouble over the years but I didn't. It's true what they say: as one door closes another one opens. I am more of a leader than a follower, by which I mean that I like being my own boss and working in my own way rather than being ordered around. I started my own business 40 years ago

and it is true that one door closes and another one opens.

I have been working as an independent contractor installing shelving and shop fittings for many years. I work wherever required, all over Australia. I get together a team and install shelving over a few days up to a few weeks depending in the size of the job. It's hard work though relatively well paid, but it is intermittent so you also have plenty of time to do other things in your life. I always have ideas on the go. Thailand has business opportunities and I've been travelling there over several years just looking around to see what is available.

I went to China about 2004 to see if I could set up a business there. I had established some contacts via the internet but wanted to see it personally. While I was there I came across a punter who was familiar with the horse racing industry in Australia and had even bet on one of my horses. It is a small world.

My dad died in 1978 at the age of 63. He started experiencing a lot of pain in the late 'seventies and it turned out to be bowel cancer. He must have had it for a while but he didn't know it and ended up dying pretty quickly. After my father died, Mr. Walter Jona, who was the Member for Hawthorn and Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, sent his condolences and a wreath to the funeral. I had this beautiful letter of appreciation from Immigration for his work there, how dad made everyone feel welcome when they came to Australia.

I will be 66 soon but still do shelving installations for Target stores and can outwork the young blokes. Why retire? I'm still earning good money. When we are in the old people's home all there is to talk about is our money and our property. But I have lots of memories to talk about and money can't buy you that.

I also developed bowel cancer in 1998 but my operation was successful. These days my health is reasonable and I follow the same advice I gave my friend George Plakic, who was a big Yugoslav guy, so muscular and strong he was like a bull, but he still came down with major health problems.

My advice is simple: "Give Up" never won a race, and "Think Big" won two Melbourne Cups. So be positive and think big.

Tom Tscherepko, 2013

Nick Szwed: Traffic Engineer

My parents were born in Belarus which was under Polish rule at the time and when they were about 18 years old they were forced by the Nazi invaders to work in Germany to assist with their World War 2 effort. My father was Michal Szwed and my mother was Maria Chudzinska. They met and married while in Germany and my elder sister Kathy and I were both born in Germany.

When the Nazis were defeated my parents decided to go to South America with their friends. Belarus was now under Russian control and my parents had heard stories that anyone who helped the Germans was sent to Siberia.

Unfortunately my Mum was told she could not go on a long ocean journey in her pregnant state. So they missed the boat. Dad was furious with Mum and stressed out a bit while waiting. He was worried that the Russians would track him down and escort him to Siberia.

Migrating to Australia

By the time I arrived my parents had decided to go to Australia because they had heard some good stories about it and, I suppose, because it was so far away from the Russians. My mother loved this country and thanked God for his guidance in making the decision to come here right up until her dying day.

My mum and I were very sick on the ocean journey; it was probably food poisoning on the train prior to boarding the ship. My Mum was really concerned that I might end up being buried at sea.

Kathy, Nick and Maria Szwed at Bonegilla, 1951.

We travelled on the Hellenic Prince which was previously an Aussie warship and arrived in Melbourne on 24 April 1950. We then travelled by train from Station Pier to Bonegilla. From there my parents headed off to work in Mildura. My sister Luba was born in Mildura.

My dad then headed to Melbourne for better paid work in a factory in Footscray while we stayed in Mildura.

Building in St Albans

Dad soon heard that land was very cheap in St Albans and bought a block in Beaver Street. Most people were building small bungalows but my dad decided to build a full house.

Mr Leo Dobes, a neighbour, drew up the plans and with the help of friends dad started building. It was slow going and mum was concerned at what he was up to down south. So he finally came up to fetch us.

We had very high expectations for our first house and were thoroughly let down as we stood in front of a half finished construction site. Anyway it was ours and that was special. So we started off living in two rooms – which was just like a bungalow.

My first memories of St Albans are of a small village where you soon got to recognise everyone you saw. And there were lots of paddocks to explore. My brother Victor was born soon after we came to St Albans.

One day a friend of mums arrived crying because she could not afford the rent and was being evicted. Well there was no hesitation, they would have to move in with us and each family could have a room.

Mum and dad didn't have much education. Mum had really wanted to go on with school but did not get the opportunity. She went back to "school" in later life in her seventies at Victoria University to study some English subjects. Dad started off as a factory worker. He learnt to operate metal turning machinery and gained a Fitter and Turner's trade certificate.

Ahmed Ajayoglu is the first kid I remember of my age group and school year level. He lived just around the corner from us before they shifted to a house opposite the primary school (with the tuckshop). He was just a couple of doors away from Leo Dobes junior who was a year behind us.

Starting Primary School

I started at St Albans State Primary School in 1955. I cried on my first day because after our first assembly everyone just walked away and left me standing there. I didn't know what I had to do or where I had to go. I was confused and just stood there and was left behind. The teachers had to get my big sister to console me.

I started school with people like Joe Ribarow, Anton Correlje, Otto Czernik, Michael Martignoles, Radenko Jankovic, Nina Skorobogati, Ingrid Wagner, Boronia Mazurek, Denise Rogers (who was the first girl I chased in the play ground to steal a kiss), Lynette Cox, Theresa Hovenga, Peter Barbopoulos, Frans Jansen, Stefan Czyz, Ahmed Ajayoglu.

After school we'd go home, have a snack and then go outside and play with the neighbourhood kids and on weekends we would go and explore the paddocks. I can remember playing "chasey" and "hidey" in the streets. The best day was when there was such a heavy fog that you could just run straight up the middle of the street about 30 yards and disappear from the person who was "he". Before and after school in those days we used to listen to the "serials" on radio: Biggles, the Faraway Tree, Superman etc.

St Albans State School was filling fast so some of us had to move into a temporary school in the St Albans Hall. We then went off to St Albans East when it opened in 1956.

I can remember having a crush on Lynette Cox, a fight with Marin Gunew, being monkey bar champ with John Farrugia (who later married Denise Rogers), lawn mowing monitor, watching my first TV shows at Ronnie Vella's place after school and grade 6 teacher Mr McAllen who gave some people nicknames like Sarge and Yoyo and barracked for Collingwood. Mr McAllen was so full of praise for Collingwood, I could not help falling in love with the club and still am.

Maria and Michal Szwed with Kathy. Nick, Victor, and Luba, St Albans in the 1950s

Introduction to Television

I remember in 1956 wandering off to Errington Reserve with one of the local kids on a Saturday afternoon and being absolutely fascinated by the

first television set that I ever saw. It was in the window of the cricket/footy club rooms behind the tin shed and was showing the Olympic Games. Soon after, you would see people gathering at shop windows where they sold TV sets watching this amazing new technology.

Apparently the take-up of Television by St Albans residents was one of the highest in Australia and the world. Maybe that was because it was a way for migrants to keep in touch with the outside world where they had come from.

It was probably in about 1959 when I went outside after getting home from school and having a drink. I stood there for a few minutes looking up and down the street. No kids to be seen. I turned around went inside and turned on the TV. After TV arrived, playing outside with neighbours gradually disappeared. I joined the Scout Cubs for a couple of years but instead of graduating to a full Scout I joined the the St Johns Ambulance Cadets which I enjoyed much more. Perhaps my sense of saving life or injury was there from the start (see my career later).

St Albans High School

In 1961 it was off to St Albans High. I can remember my first day: at morning recess we went to the door and I was bewildered to see so many kids. I had never seen so many kids in one place before.

Some of my best memories are Joe and I sitting behind Lynette and Helen in class in the middle years. I also remember in about Form 2 or 3 that I had an enormous desire to understand everything about the Universe and everything. I also used to read a lot of Sci Fi.

Nick Szwed with Lynette Cox and Helen Smith

My worst memory is of “Big” Mr Smith screaming and abusing me in front of class for using my master key (I was locker monitor) to open a locker without his approval.

Some best friends: Joe Ribarow, Michael Hatjiandreou, Marin Gunew. Some girls I was attracted to: Lynette, Janice, Elizabeth, Maija and Jutta. My favourite teachers: Miss Nightingale and Mr McAllen in primary school, Miss Butler, Mr Rayner, Mr Matthews at the high school.

At high school some of the friendships that started in primary school were cemented for life. Over the years, I’ve always kept in touch with Joe Ribarow, Michael and Cathy Hatjiandreou, Lindsay Chatterton and Peter Nowatschenko.

Form 4A with Miss Joan Butler, 1964.

My parents' relationship was becoming quite rocky at this stage and I remember making a promise to myself to have a successful marriage and family life. When they split-up it became one of my life goals.

After St Albans High

I left St Albans High for University High at the end of Form 5, 1965. After the matriculation exams I got a job with the Commonwealth Bank and waited for the exam results. I had studied reasonably hard because I saw this as the only way to overcome my financial disadvantage. For a brief time I had thought about being a priest. I also almost joined the Air Force but in the end could not see myself in a uniform toeing the line. I also considered becoming a teacher.

I did quite well in the Matric exams but could not afford to go to Uni. I needed a scholarship, otherwise it would be a career in banking. I had applied for several scholarships and cadetships. Luckily I scored a cadetship with the Country Roads Board which paid my way through Uni. I studied civil engineering and then specialised with a Masters degree in Transport.

My marble came up to fight the war in Vietnam but I detested the idea so much that I somehow got the message through in the interviews and medicals and was not asked to enlist.

In 1969 while at Melb Uni I joined the Equality in Education Campaign. A guy called Uldis Ozolins was running it. I could never forget that name. I think he was related to Slartibartfast

– the guy who etched out the Norwegian Fiords. (If you don't understand, you need to read The Hitchikers Guide to the Galaxy.) Anyway, Uldis told me that Nobert Loeffler at St Albans High was politically active and was interested in getting involved in the campaign so I arranged a meeting. We joined forces and started a bit of a campaign in the main shopping centre of St Albans on Saturday mornings. Norbert, I and a few other students handed out pamphlets and spoke to people in the street about the importance of equality in education. One Saturday afternoon after handing out pamphlets, I got a phone call at home from 3AW and was interviewed about our campaign on air. It was great fun.

Uni Studies and Socialising

In 1967, in my first year at Uni, Marin Gunew was a good friend and he kept telling me about this wonderful girl who was doing matriculation with him at St Albans High. I met her at his 18th birthday. She was alright. Over the next couple of years a group of us would hang out together: Marin and brother Stefan, Lindsay Chatterton, Peter Nowatschenko and brother Paul, Michael Hatjiandreou and sister Cathy, Maija Svars, my sister Luba and brother Vic, Marilyn Hullett and Bruce, Marin's good friend Jutta Heymig and others. The attraction between Jutta and me grew quickly and we became an item.

Nick Szwed and Jutta Heymig

The interesting thing is that we both went to St Albans East Primary and the High School together, just separated by one year. We must have passed each other in the corridors and grounds many times but we were never aware of each other until Marin introduced us.

We became engaged, then several months later split up. But the attraction was too strong and we got back together and then married in 1973.

Jutta became a teacher, we worked hard and travelled a bit and couldn't make up our mind whether to start a family. We put off the decision for a while but eventually made up our minds to go ahead. We have three lovely daughters.

Life as a Traffic Engineer

I specialised in traffic engineering at the Country Roads Board/RCA/RTA/VicRoads. I also spent some time at the Ministry of Transport and a short time with a private consultant. I worked hard but could never quite conform to the corporate culture.

Towards the end of my career I ended up specialising in Road Safety. This was the most satisfying part of my career and a wonderful way to finish it. I was at a middle management level so I had a good degree of autonomy and ability to make decisions. But I was still a specialist respected for my engineering knowledge. Fortunately also, the government of the day had road safety on its agenda. I was thus able to bring in a number of new initiatives to save lives on the roads. My proudest example is the speed limits at schools and through strip shopping centres.

Semi Retirement

I went into semi-retirement in 2004 and continue to work part-time on road safety projects for VicRoads and manage a project examining speed limits on an Australasian basis for Austroads. I still maintain strong professional connections through lots of lunch time meetings in restaurants.

Even though semi-retired I am still quite busy, never enough time. But I set my own priorities and therefore have more time for socialising, drinking red wine, jogging, quaffing red, cycling, sipping red, hobbies, travelling and tasting reds, photography (still and video) and observing reds, bush walking (including serious off-track bush bashing), sniffing red, organising reunions, enjoying a red with friends, reading books on how the mind works, how the Universe works and articles on how red works.

It took me 40 years to understand life, another ten to really get the hang of it, and now I have just about perfected it. I'm still refining the art of enjoying each day to its fullest. Over the years I've thought a lot upon the meaning of life, the universe and everything. I reckon I had my mid-life crisis in my late 20's after my dad died. I am happy to have worked out what it's all about and now I feel at one with the universe.

Jutta and Nick Szwed, 2006.

Luba Uwarow nee Szwed: Teacher

I was born Luba Szwed in Mildura on March 5th, 1951. Hasn't time flown! My parents were Maria and Michael Szwed who migrated to Australia in April 1950 to "the best country in the world" as they later said. I agree. My parents were both born in Belarus but were from different villages. The region was under Polish rule at the time and when the Germans invaded Poland in 1939 they also occupied Belarus. My mum and her sister Olga were in their late teens when the Nazi invaders forced them and many others to work in Germany to assist with the World War Two effort, as the factories were being depleted of German men who were being conscripted. That is also how my father ended up in Germany where he and Mum met and married after the war.

Displaced Persons

After the Allies defeated the Nazis in 1945 my parents became part of the mass of homeless refugees or displaced persons who had no idea what was going to happen to them. But life goes on whether your future is clear or not, so they married and my elder sister Kathy was born in Germany while they were still in the refugee camp. There was little hope of returning to Belarus because it was now under Russian control and my parents did not want to live under the Communists. Mum was in a dilemma because she was worried that not returning to Belarus would be seen as "deserting" and possibly mean her family would be sent to Siberia. The threat of being sent to Siberia was not just imaginary, as Stalin had in fact proposed that Soviet nationals who had lived under German occupation be exiled to Siberia.

Things remained very unsettled and unresolved over the next two years, so when in 1947 some of their friends from the camp were accepted to migrate to South America, Mum and Dad decided to join them. They applied and were pleased to be accepted.

Then Mum fell pregnant again and was not allowed to join the others who were leaving on the ship. At that stage they probably would have gone anywhere to escape the poverty and hardship of their existence - as long as it was not Russia.

They were still in Germany when my older brother Nick was born in 1949. After that time my parents chose to come to Australia and risk this unknown part of the world rather than go back to their war-torn homeland.

Migrating to Australia

The family of four left by train in late 1949 headed for Italy, from where the IRO-chartered ships were leaving for Australia. In Italy they boarded the Princess Helena for their new homeland.

When they arrived in Melbourne they were taken to Bonegilla and spent a couple of months in the migrant camp there. Then they were sent to another camp near the airport in Mildura, and spent about a year or more there. That's where I was born, in Mildura.

Dad eventually left the migrant hostel to get a job in Footscray. He wanted to earn more money so he could buy a block of land and start building a home. So while he was in Melbourne Mum and the two kids were in Mildura. Then in April 1951 we moved to St Albans and into the house that Dad built, and I really haven't left the area since then. In fact it was just a part house that Dad had built, so we were like all the other migrants who were starting off in a little bungalow. I was about one month old at the time, so I knew nothing of what was happening but I've heard the stories.

Growing up in St Albans

I remember my childhood as being very happy and I enjoyed growing up with my older sister Kathy, big brother Nick, and baby brother Victor. We grew up on Beaver Street, just a few minutes walk to the St Albans railway station and virtually just around the corner from the high school when it was built.

[Szwed family (L-R): Luba, Katy, Victor, Maria, Nick, Michael, circa 1960.

We lived in a neighbourhood drawn from different countries of the world and I grew up with friends like Teresa (Polish), Lydia (Ukrainian), Alice (Polish), Yanni (Estonian), Philip (Australian), Susan (Australian), and Leo and Maria (Czechoslovakian). Is that multi cultural or what? Even Mr Bolvari, who was my French teacher at the St Albans High School, moved into Beaver Street for a while and became good friends of the family.

Primary and Secondary Education

I started school at the old St Albans Primary in West Esplanade, which I attended for about a month whilst the St Albans East school was being finished. To me the Principal Mr Carney was quite memorable because he was into Irish dancing in a big way! Those were great years when my Mum would ride her bicycle to school with a flask of hot chocolate at lunchtime and those shelter sheds protected us from the weather.

I remember my years at the St Albans High School for a number of reasons. Uniforms were a big thing at the school and for the girls it included summer and winter outfits, berets, gloves, tunics, ties, and grey stockings. I made quite a number of friends and there were very memorable teachers such as Mr McLeish, who was my favourite English teacher. He was always encouraging and optimistic. Others included Mr Alcorn, Mrs Gliddon, Ms Butler, Mr Torpey, Mr Chilton, and Mr Malaniuk, the Russian teacher. Wasn't Mr Webster a hunk and just a young thing then!

I always planned to be a secretary, so I chose the commercial course at school with typing and shorthand as core subjects. My ambition of becoming a secretary didn't eventuate, but hasn't the typing skill come in handy with the computer age? And they say you never learn anything at school!

After I completed form 6 I applied for a studentship and enrolled to do teacher training. I completed the three-year T.S.T.C Dip.Dom.Arts course at Larnook Teachers College and then one year at Emily McPherson College in the City.

In 1971 during my training I completed a teaching round at St Albans High School and discovered that the Home Economics Kitchen hadn't changed much since I left the school, and I don't think it has been upgraded yet!

I started teaching at Williamstown Girls High School in 1973 and had the pleasure to work with some wonderful Principals (all ex-St Albans High teachers) including Mr Arnold Shaw, Ms Irene Wescott, and Mr Davis (who was once my Art teacher at St Albans).

I have been teaching at Kealba College for twenty years and come across other teachers who also went to my old school. Paul and Lana Fox (she was Lana Mahorin before she married) are also former St Albans High students who are on the staff at Kealba. Last year I received acknowledgement of my 35 years of service to Education in Victoria.

Mum's Philosophy on Life

Mum's philosophy of life was: "Don't worry, accept your lot in life. Try to improve it but accept it as it is." That philosophy of positive attitude in life and striving for progress but accepting the inevitable sustained her through the early years in her new home raising four young children. It also had to sustain her when she and Dad separated in the late sixties, though she continued to live in the home in Beaver Street.

Visiting Belarus

By the mid 'fifties Mum had re-established contact with her family in Belarus through one aunt with whom she corresponded. Then in 1977 I went with her for a holiday to her old home town. That was an interesting experience. The place looked pretty run down, with poor streets, few shops, and there were queues for food. We arrived in time for Mum to see her beloved Uncle Peter who was quite elderly and unwell. He was really pleased to see her. Mum's sister returned to Belarus after the war and had survived though she was lamenting not having joined Mum in migrating to Australia. She was now echoing mum's original belief that the communist system had done no good for the area.

Mum passed away last year (2005).

Personal Situation

I married in 1974 and have four wonderful children: Phillip (now aged 27), Marisa (24), Tanya (22) and Mark (20). My marriage lasted 21 years, which is quite a long time by today's standards.

I am currently living in Keilor Downs, which is a distinct district with its own identity, but it's part of the area that was included in the St Albans of earlier days, so it's true to say I have lived in St Albans all my life. My favourite pastime at present is Ballroom Dancing. Maybe after another five years in Education I will consider retiring. Sounds good to me.

Luba Uwarow, 2006.

Jutta and Nick Szwed, Luba Uwarow, Paul Ledney, Anna and Victor Szwed, 2016.

Vanda Bognar nee Viti: Teacher

Here I am. I'm 63. I have been married for 41 years. My husband and I have raised three wonderful adults - two daughters and one son. We have five beautiful grandchildren ... and life is good. We are now retired and living in the Central Highlands of Victoria.

When I say that life is good, I have to admit that life has always been good.

I arrived in Australia with my parents and four brothers in 1950. We came from Fiume, Italy, which after World War II became Rjeka, Yugoslavia. When the transfer of sovereignty actually occurred the Italians in Fiume were given a chance to leave and declare themselves political refugees. We ended up in Venice, during which time my father, who had been in the Merchant Navy, decided that we should immigrate to Australia. Having been on a ship and having seen the world he always wanted to go and see Australia because his brothers had. He'd read about kangaroos, but his favourite animal was the platypus. He had a book on animals of the world and he was absolutely fascinated that an animal like the platypus actually existed!

After Venice and all the immigration paperwork we ended up in another refugee camp in Naples and finally went to Bremerhaven in Germany where we boarded the General Muir together with all the other immigrants heading for Australia.

Arrival in Australia

In Australia we arrived in Port Melbourne and were transported to the Bonegilla Migrant Hostel. After spending some months in Bonegilla, we were transported to the Broadmeadows Migrant Hostel, which was part of an operational Army Camp. What a joy for us kids ... tanks, machinery, soldiers! It was fenced off and out of bounds for us kids, but we managed to get through! I was seven years old and life was one big adventure.

My parents were in their early 40s. I have been asked how they adjusted to the huge change in their lives. Well, all I can say is it was an adventure for them too. We moved to a 5-acre property down the road from the migrant hostel. My parents had come from the city but they really got stuck into country living, my mother with all her chooks and my father going hunting for rabbits every morning before work. They got right into their new life and loved it. There was always singing and laughter in our life.

There was no primary school near the migrant hostel, so us hostel kids went to the Westbreen Primary School in Fawkner. In the early 1950s there were no trains from the migrant camp to the school but there was a diesel rail bus called the Beetle that ran on tracks from Campbellfield and would meet the trainline further south.

Coming to St Albans

After Broadmeadows, in 1954, the family moved to St Albans to be close to the other Fiumani families already living there in their huts and sheds. For many years St Albans was famous for its half-houses, huts, and sheds. In retrospect I must admire the women who managed a full and happy life living in such humble dwellings. The migrant men went to work to get enough money to add another room to the bungalow. The children? We were happy. We were loved, secure, and well fed, and we had no idea of deprivation or poverty ... but you would have thought that Sunshine Council would have made some effort in providing some gravel on our muddy roads. We were a migrant community - quite ignored.

I loved St Albans. I arrived in time to start Grade 5 at St Albans Primary School. After having become quite expert at wagging classes for three years at St Pauls in Coburg and Westbreen in Coburg, I had finally arrived at a school I loved. A girl called Switlana came up to me on the first day of school: "You're new. Well, you can be my friend." She was the most popular girl in the school with a following of over 15 kids. She was confident and articulate and she looked like my image of Snow White. We had a wonderful time at primary school and became best friends for many years to follow.

My father was working at the Maribyrnong Munitions Factory. Though my father was an experienced diesel mechanic, in Australia he worked as a labourer and process worker in the factories. Many years later he changed to the Pram Factory. As he used to say, at first he was making bullets to kill all the people, and now he was looking after their babies.

My mother worked full-time as a housewife without any of the modern conveniences. She was boiling the laundry in the copper, making all our clothes, and living in a tin garage that was partitioned into a kitchen, a bedroom for five kids, and the master bedroom. We lived like that for about two years while my father, the neighbour, and my older brother were building the home.

It was interesting, those days. We loved it, because kids will love anything as long as they are well fed and loved and happy. As long as you have these you don't care where you live.

Our Neighbourhood

The street where I lived was a multi-national village, and everyone got along beautifully. The women created their own language made up of Italian, English, German, Yugoslav, Polish, Greek, Maltese, and Ukrainian. It was funny to listen to them talk about children, husbands, sewing, cooking, and gossiping about others. Somehow they understood each other with a lot of laughter and mime and they were always prepared to improvise - like our neighbour who went to Mrs Wardle's general store to buy a colander and asked for a "water she go, spaghetti she stay." The Australian traders must have had a few laughs in those days. The migrant men were more conservative and were reluctant to to mix and speak until they had picked up enough English.

I went to school with the Dobrowolski girls: Helga, Maria, Anna, Regina, and Olena. The Dobrowolskis lived in the four houses opposite us. Each Saturday the men worked on their extensions, like everyone else in Pennell Avenue, but Saturday night was party time. I loved it. Us kids would go from our four Italian houses across the road to their four houses watching the men laughing and singing and wiping out the cares of the world. I loved the Dobrowolskis, their happiness, their tragedies, their sorrows. They will always be a part of me.

Starting at Sunshine

In 1956 we were off to high school. That was an exciting year: the perfect school uniform, the timetable, being so grown up ... complete with locker keys and catching the train. Our high school in St Albans was in the process of being built, so for the first year of St Albans High School we were housed in the Hall of the Presbyterian Church in Sunshine. We boarded the Bendigo train at St Albans, got off at Sunshine, and walked over the overpass to the Hall. On the overpass the boys would have a great time grabbing each other's caps and dropping them on the passing trains. Parents spent a lot of money on school caps that year!

The year at the Hall was wonderful. There were 120 of us divided into four forms. We had great teachers. They were so nice and calm and they treated us like we were special. Mr James Barker was the Principal and his wife Mrs Bernice Barker was the Headmistress. I remember Mr Alcorn, always smiling with his twinkling eyes, Mr Murphy, gentle and kind, Mr Walsh, with his dramatic way of bringing History to life, and Mr Lahy, young and very funny.

The Hall was surrounded by a beautiful garden. My friends and I would go to the farthest corner as our spot for lunch. One day we got a bit of a shock because one of the nice gardeners started flashing at us! We were quite incensed. Switlana, who was our leader, decided that we should report him to the Headmistress.

Switlana knocked on the staffroom door. Whoever answered the door said, "No. I'm sorry, Mrs Barker is having her lunch." We made it quite clear that it was very important. When she came to the door we told her one of the gardeners was showing us "his thing". That was the last we saw of that gardener. The "thing" had lost him his job.

The term Multiculturalism hadn't been coined yet, but our School Concert that year was quite a spectacle of multiculturalism. I joined my friend Switlana in a series of Russian dances. Here I was with my Italian background doing a Russian dance with all the streamers and the costume.

1956 was not only important because it was the birth of our High School. It was also the year of the Olympic Games in Melbourne and much of our curriculum was devoted to the Olympic Games. That was interesting, but more interesting was the start of Television! Patersons Furniture Store on Main Road West had a television set in the window and after tea people would go for a walk to watch the television. We loved it.

Starting at St Albans

In 1957 our new school in Main Road East was ready to be occupied. I remember our first school assembly and how excited we were. There were more teachers, and of course the new lot of first formers, but we were the special group and as the school grew through the years we alway remained the elite!

That year my father, my brothers, and some neighbours got our house completed to "lock up" stage. There was a tradition in St Albans that when the house frame was up and the roof pitched, someone would place a bunch of flowers on the highest point. At that time St Albans was full of flowers on rooftops. Our house being at lock up stage meant that we could live in it, although there were no internal walls. My mother partitioned the bedrooms with sheets, and for the first time in my life I had a bedroom of my own. Eventually the sheets were replaced by plaster.

As I think back to my High School years I have only good memories. I had a ball, surrounded by happy friends and great teachers.

We were good at sport and singing and drama. Mr Reid entered us in the High Schools Drama Festival and we took out first prize, competing against so many well-established schools and private schools. After that I decided that I would become an actress and win the first Academy Award for Australia. Mr Reid got me interested in going to the National Institute of Dramatic Arts. When I mentioned it to my mother she nearly had a fit. She wasn't going to have her only daughter on a casting couch! So I became a Primary School Teacher.

Dramatic Arts

It was wonderful to see Mr and Mrs Barker at the 25th celebration of St Albans High School. Mr Barker told me: "You know Vanda, all these years I've been watching television and films always waiting for you to come on." My reply was: "Well, I became a teacher, which is not very different from being an actress. At least I have centre stage every day!"

Miss Kennedy was a St Albans girl. She was our Home Economics teacher ... a lovely, gentle person. Switlana and I gave her a fright one bitterly cold lunchtime when she came to collect the tea towels from the drying cupboard, and there we were sitting on the floor eating our pies!

Mr Mill was great. How wonderful of him to spend his Saturdays taking our softball team to play in competitions around Melbourne. He was a good Geography teacher too. I still know how to read a weather map: the cold fronts, the warm fronts, the highs and lows.

Mr Reid had a great influence on me. I loved him. As a member of his Drama Club I developed so much confidence; too much actually. I always had the leading part so I had come to expect it over the years - and I always got it - so I strutted around with my airs and graces, with my buddies Switlana and Silvana by my side.

Every time I hear "Advance Australia Fair" I think of dear Mr Lahy. He was our Music teacher and he taught us that song in Form 2, as well as other Australian songs and English songs. I remember thinking why do we sing "God Save the Queen" when "Advance Australia Fair" is so much better? So when Australia finally decided to have its own national anthem I thought surely "Advance Australia Fair" would be selected, and it was, but how embarrassing that some of our Olympics athletes didn't know the words ... but us St Albans kids knew! We even knew the second verse. Dear Mr Lahy, wherever your soul is in the cosmos, thank you. You were a true republican.

In our day when you got to Form 3 you had to decide to take the professional course or the commercial course. I chose the professional stream as did my friends, but so many students chose the commercial course. They did shorthand and typing and whatever, and soon left school to get jobs. That was a pity really, because they were mostly the Australian kids who were so articulate and clever, but obviously their parents didn't think education was that important or couldn't afford to keep them at school. Too many of these clever kids left school at 14 or 15. Only 22 of us stayed on to the end, mainly migrant kids, whose parents saw education as a way of bettering our lives.

The teachers who had been with us from the start treated us like we were special, but some of the new teachers weren't too impressed with us.

I loved Mr Clark who was our English teacher in Form 5. He was so cool, calm and collected with an air of superiority, but I saw through that, and funnily enough I was the same as a teacher, finding the whole experience hilariously funny and entertaining, while maintaining my sophisticated air.

Sporting Activities

We were so good at sport, with no facilities. In fifth form I was involved with the high jump and

was pretty good at that; I could jump the highest. I was also in the basketball team.

Captain S Bohudski (front right) with E Hermann, I Kryzius, V Kepalas, V Viti (second from left), K Grabowski, V Sryter, S Antonczyk, S Wazny.

One day I contradicted the sports mistress and she called me "insolent". What a good word! I hadn't heard of that one before. She gave me detention. I thought: *'excuse-moi*. You're giving detention to *moi* in Form 5? I'm special here. Don't you know that?' Anyway, I didn't turn up at detention because we had the inter-school athletics the following week and we wanted to practise our high jump and relay. So what did she do? She pulled me out of the sports! That year it was me, the previous year it was Switlana. Our friend Silvana was placid and sensible in comparison. She was the Head Prefect and never did silly things like Switlana and me. Silvana was also my neighbour so our families have remained friends to this day.

We went on excursions and outings. Our first sleepover was at Drouin High School. We went there to play netball and stayed overnight, being billeted in local farms. I remember being woken up at 4 in the morning when the family got up to do the milking. To me it was the middle of the night, but there was the mother shoving a cup of tea in your hand and saying, "You can go back to sleep, girls." All you got was a cup of tea and then back to sleep.

Then came the big breakfast when dad and the boys finished all the milking. We're talking big sausages, bacon, and eggs - almost like Christmas dinner at 8 o'clock in the morning.

School Changes

From day one to the very last day we all loved the school and we loved each other. Of course we were the big ones all the time, slightly superior. We weren't patronising, but we knew we were special and strutted around. When other teachers arrived they must have thought of us as little pip squeaks: 'Fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds, and they think they're superior. We'll put a spanner in their works.' We had some changes after these new people arrived, whereas all the other ones just loved us.

The school had a very strict uniform code, which prefects and teachers checked regularly. One day Switlana and I were sent on a message down to the shops. We were walking along Main Road East having a wonderful time using our berets as Frisbees. Whoever saw us must have thought it was disgusting behaviour for a couple of Prefects because they dobbed us in. So we were de-badged for a month. Dear Mr Barker didn't make it public. In fact no one else even noticed because our blazers were still edged with the Prefect's braid. We loved Mr Barker and he loved us.

Debutante Ball

The first Deb Ball arranged by the school was held at the Tin Shed, which one of the only local halls available to hold such events. It was all Mrs Barker's idea and was a very formal occasion.

All the young ladies had to wear long gowns and long gloves and all the young men who were the ladies' escorts were in tuxedos; it was all very smart and elegant. We had to do all these dances and dance with our fathers for the very first dance of the evening. All the parents were very proud of us and loved the pageantry.

After that I grew up and went to Teachers College to start a lifelong career in teaching. It was the end of an era in many ways as the first intake of students were moving out of the school and into adult-hood. There were changes within the teaching staff, even including our beloved headmaster. Mr Barker and his wife were originally from Corryong. I think they retired not long after we left high school and went back to Corryong, though I'm not entirely sure about the timing. When they came to the school re-union in 1981 they were living at Tallangatta which is not far from Bonegilla on Lake Hume.

Melbourne Teachers College

I did my teacher training at the Melbourne Teachers College straight after I finished high school.

One of the girls at teachers college actually lived in the Botanic Gardens; her father was the head gardener. I remember asking her where she lived and when she said the Botanic Gardens I laughed and said "I bet you do." One day after college she took me there. There in the Botanic Gardens was the cottage, and there they lived.

After graduating I wanted to go to Manangatang South to teach, because it sounded right, sounded really good. Between friends we had decided we were going to go bush, go to the country and marry rich farmers.

So, where did I get sent? Albion North Primary School.

Family Life

After that I met Peppi Bognar, and when he shifted to Morwell to work at the power station I moved to Moe, a stimulating place. That's where we married and had our first child.

Then my father died and I decided that I should come back to support Mum because she was on her own. My father died in 1963 from a heart attack a couple of weeks short of his 58th birthday. It was a bit of a shock to my mother. She lived pretty much on her own for about six months and became depressed, which is why we came back to St Albans to provide some support. So my mother's place became my home again for the next 40 years.

Retirement

After 40 years of work as a teacher I got a certificate of appreciation from the Education Department. We now live in Rocklyn, where we moved 8 years ago. We bought 12 acres between Daylesford and Creswick with the idea of retiring there. Then we planted a pine plantation of two acres and other varieties of trees, because I wanted to live in a botanic garden. We took Mum with us to Rocklyn where she died four years ago at the age of 93. I've always been grateful to her because I couldn't have had a 40-year career without a mother to help look after the kids. Peppi and I could always go out for an evening knowing the kids were in good hands.

I have so many happy memories of my old school days at St Albans High School. I have so many stories I would love to share, but I'd better stop before I bore everyone to tears. I loved all my teachers. I loved all my friends. I loved all my classmates. I could have written a lot about them ... Vernes Pleiskna, Vambola Stanislavskis, Jeff Barlow, Bela Ajayoglu, Toni Blahut, Les Thurgood, Terry Smith, Switlana Bohudski, Silvana Crespi, Vejuna Kepalas, Francis Zeglinski ... all the ones I remember so vividly ... so many happy times. Best wishes for your health and happiness.

Vanda (Viti) Bognar, 2005.

Postscript: Vanda Bognar nee Viti passed away on 22 February 2012.

Evelyn Hovenga nee Vroom: Health Professional, Professor of Informatics

Evelyn Johanna Sophia Vroom was born on 12 August 1945 and migrated with her sister and parents during the 1950s under the Netherlands Australian Assisted Passage Scheme. Her parents were Joahannes Vroom and Guurtje Koopman, and her sister was Catharina. They settled in Leonard Avenue, St Albans, not far from the High School. Australia had signed a migration agreement with the Netherlands government in 1951, and by the end of December 1957 about 37,000 Dutch migrants had settled in Australia. Many went through Bonegilla, Australia's first and largest migrant reception centre at the time, about 12 kilometres from Wodonga. The corrugated iron army huts along the shores of Lake Hume became the temporary home for over 300,000 people before they moved on to more permanent housing. The Dutch community were not one of the largest groups in St Albans; they started arriving in the mid fifties and soon there new names to be learnt: Keef Kropman, Tom Correlje, Andre van Kuyk, Jan and Tjitske de Vries, Thea van de Kuyt, Johannes van Liempd, and Henricus and Maria van der Kruys to name only a few.

St Albans High School

Anna Vennik remembers that Evelyn Vroom was a bright girl at school: "When she came to St Albans High she didn't speak much English so the teacher paired her with me because I could speak Dutch having arrived as a migrant in 1956. Evelyn picked up the language quite quickly and you could see she was going to succeed educationally."

And she succeeded remarkably well, surely being one of the best examples of how one can progress through lifelong learning and knowledge acquisition. Anna and Evelyn became good friends and were bridesmaids at each other's weddings. Even when Evelyn moved interstate in later years they always kept in contact.

Evelyn had completed first year high school in the Netherlands, started in Form 1 at St Albans High upon arrival in September but soon moved to Form 2B where she passed the final year exam held late November. She then completed Form 3A with an average grade of 73% and left school to contribute to the family's income. The form teacher (Doug Hill) noted that 'Evelyn has made remarkable progress this term and should gain excellent results next year, if she remains at school'. The Head master (James Barker) tried to convince her to stay and told Evelyn that education was free to which she

replied, ‘my family needs the extra income’. She was surprised that he didn’t appear to understand that. The High School's 1959 Alba magazine has a photo of her with classmates in Form 3A.

Starting Work

Anna Vennik had left school the previous year and was working in the same office in the textile manufacturing industry as her older sister Corrie. They were able to secure an office junior job at the same place for Evelyn. She stayed there for seven months, by then she had secured a better paying job at ‘Rubbertex’, a rubber manufacturing plant, as a costing clerk closer to home, thus saving the weekly train fare.

While working full time Evelyn went to night school, Taylor’s College in the city, to complete her high school studies to enable her to begin nursing in 1963 at the Royal Children’s hospital. Her appointment had to be approved by the Hospital Board as she hadn’t completed six years of high school, which was that hospital’s preference although the regulatory requirement was the completion of four years high school.

Marriage

Evelyn Vroom married Klaas "Ken" Hovenga in 1964. Ken's was another of the Dutch families who came to St Albans in the 1950s, and his three sisters, Ytje, Wentje and Tryntje all went to the high school. (Ytje, the oldest of the girls, started in 1956 which was the school's inaugural year.) Evelyn's marriage required her to leave her nurse training as in those days it was a requirement for all student nurses to live in the nurses’ home. Evelyn and Ken had two daughters: Karen was born in 1968 and Helen in 1970. The marriage was dissolved in 1976.

Professional Career

Having successfully completed first year general nursing, Evelyn was able to continue her nursing career as an Enrolled Nurse, working in organ-imaging and as a ward clerk in a general surgical ward. She was able to obtain twelve month's credit at Western General Hospital ten years later, enabling her to complete her Registered Nurse training in 1977. Evelyn worked as an operating room nurse at the Queen Victoria Hospital and became the Charge Nurse of the private Jessie McPherson operation room suite from 1977 to 1980. In 1979 Evelyn obtained a Diploma of Applied Science of Hospital Nursing and Unit Management from Lincoln Institute (now Latrobe University) followed by a Bachelor’s degree in Applied Science (advanced nursing) in 1982. The latter included computer science which set her on the path to become a health informatics expert.

In 1980 Evelyn changed direction by taking up a position at the then Health Commission of Victoria, first as a Health Service Management consultant for the Department of Information Services:

“That job advertisement was written in a manner that instantly engaged me as the ‘job designed for me’. It required me to complete an intensive week four course in workstudy at Footscray Institute of Technology (Now Victoria University), that was later supplemented with an in-house professional course of instruction on Modular Arrangement of Predetermined Time Standards (MODAPTS) including office and transit modapts."

This position required Evelyn to undertake various productivity reviews and time studies in areas such as pathology, organ imaging and nursing. This resulted in the development of the Patient Assessment Information System (PAIS) that was first used as an aid to resolve nursing workload disputes. PAIS was later adopted within more than 100 hospitals around Australia; it was also used to form the basis of the first national study that determined the average nursing cost (nursing service weights) per hospital patient type known as Diagnosis Related Group (DRG), a methodology first introduced and trialed in Victoria that was later adopted by the Australian government for hospital funding purposes. This plus a letter from Maureen Scholes, Director of Nursing Services at the Royal London Hospital in 1984 inviting Evelyn to take on a position of national nursing representative to the newly formed Nursing Working Group of the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA), formed additional stepping stones for her future in informatics.

Evelyn transferred from the Management Services department to take up the position of senior nursing advisor in the nursing section of the hospitals division within the Victorian Health Commission in 1984-85 to manage all research required to support the Ministerial Enquiry into Nursing Victoria. During this period she undertook a short course in statistics for research workers at Melbourne University (1984) and she computerised the nursing section. At that time Evelyn used the data she now had available and developed the argument to introduce new nursing policies, two were accepted and implemented in 1985, a first for Victoria. One was to extend the district nursing service to enable them to provide 24/7 services including palliative care, and the other provided funding for education to better prepare the

nursing workforce to provide specialized nursing services such as critical care, aged care etc. She was a member of the State Government negotiating team during the 1984 Non Nursing Duties and 1986 Nursing Career Structure industrial disputes, and undertook development of cost estimates of positions adopted.

In 1986 the Victorian government funded her to fly around the world in 19 days to explore the likely impact of computing on the nursing profession. 'I was able to make use of the contacts acquired as a member of the IMIA nursing WG, I met a number of nurses who were leading this new discipline and visited hospitals in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Calgary, Washington DC, London, Leiden and Geneva.'

At that time her working environment was extremely challenging due to numerous organisational changes, the transfer of student nurses from the workforce to University studies and a new Minister of Health (1985-89) who did not support Evelyn's nursing workload measurement system used by nurses to better manage the match between nursing availability and service demands. He introduced a policy that aimed to reduce the waiting list for elective surgery and considered Evelyn's solution to be incompatible with this policy, she was prevented from providing any further support to those making use of her system. Evelyn was regarded as politically unacceptable and transferred to work on a Nurse Costing research project at the Monash hospital in Clayton.

Evelyn used this opportunity to undertake a research Master's degree at the University of New South Wales making use of all the research already undertaken in the area of nursing resource usage and costs and the work then underway. This was completed in 1989. That year she also completed some courses within the Graduate Diploma Course in Applied Information Systems at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology following which she undertook courses in economics and mathematics for the social sciences at Melbourne University. In 1995 she was awarded a PhD for her thesis "Casemix, Hospital Nursing Usage and Costs." During this time Evelyn worked as an independent Consultant for numerous hospitals and undertook a major research project from which a Universal Nursing Career Evaluation System for the Private Hospitals Association in Victoria and Queensland was developed.

Professional Activities

Evelyn was accepted as Fellow of the College of Nursing in 1980 and engaged in professional activities associated with the College and a Nursing Research group. Her first presentation on computer use was to the Victorian Nursing Research Group (VNRG) in 1982. In 1984 she contributed to the production of the Royal Australian Nurses Federation (RANF) publication on 'Computerised Patient Data and Nursing Information Systems' and in 1985 she presented a paper at the College's annual conference on 'Managing resources using computer technology'. Many presentations for a variety of organisations in numerous locations around the globe have followed since.

In 1985 two nurses from the Women's hospital called a meeting of nurses interested in computers, around 70 nurses turned up including Evelyn who became a committee member of the Nursing Computer Group Victoria (NCGV). This group was very active. One of its members, Anita Griffin, a nurse academic from Bendigo initiated and edited the first Australian publication titled 'Nurses Using Computer', in 1989 to which many other members, including Evelyn contributed a chapter. Evelyn's work with the IMIA nursing WG alerted her to the possibility of hosting one of their international conferences. She convinced the NCGV committee to put in a proposal which was presented to the WG when she attended an international workshop in Stockholm in 1987 along with many other national representatives to participate in the development of the very first set of nursing informatics competencies. The proposal to host the 1991 International Nursing Informatics conference in Melbourne was successful. She chaired the organising committee and conference and prepared all papers presented in a camera ready format for the proceedings as required by the publisher, Springer-Verlag. There were around 700 participants for a very successful conference despite the world instability caused by the 1990-91 Gulf War in the middle east. The profits funded the establishment of the Health Informatics Society of Australia (HISA), its Nursing Informatics Australia special interest group, and funded the associated secretariat.

"I contributed to the International Medical Informatics Association as Treasurer, secretary, Chaired the Nursing Informatics special interest group of which I'm now a life member, I was the Vice-President (Working and Special Interest Groups) and I chaired IMIA's education workgroup for several years during which time we published a text edited by myself and Prof John Mantas on Global Health Informatics Education (2004 IOS Press). I'm now recognised as a member of the IMIA Senior Officers Club."

Evelyn was a Board member for HISA on a couple of occasions, managed and chaired the

first national annual Health Informatics conference (HIC) in Brisbane in 1993 and the International IMIA sponsored Medinfo2007 also held in Brisbane. She was also elected to be a foundation member of the Australasian College of Health Informatics in 2002 for which she served as President (2003-5) and treasurer (2007). She was awarded life membership of this College in 2015.

Evelyn was a founding member of the Standards Australia IT-14 committee established in 1992 responsible for the development of technical standards. In that capacity was a member of the National Health Data Standards Committee, the National Health Information Standards Advisory Committee and participated in international standards development activities for ISO-TC215. She was a member of a couple of technical sub committees. During this period she was also invited to participate in various workshops for the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare as well as the Australian Government.

"I was responsible for facilitating and managing all HL7 Australia educational activities for several years; was an invited expert to IMIA's Nursing Informatics group competency development workshop in 1987, the European Nightingale Nursing Informatics competency development project during the early 1990s, an invited member of the International Medical Informatics Association's education taskforce given the responsibility to develop and publish the medical (health) informatics education recommendations followed by the 2010 review and update of these curriculum guidelines."

Academic Career

Evelyn moved to Rockhampton in 1992 to take up an academic position with Central Queensland University, progressing from Senior Lecturer to Professor in Health Informatics. Her continuing international involvement and sharing of experiences with leaders from around the world provided her with invaluable knowledge that enabled her to progress professionally. She established and directed the Health Informatics Research Centre. During this period she also worked with health service management academics from around the country as a member of SHAPE and she became a Fellow of the Australian College for Health Service Executives. Evelyn's contribution to the informatics industry was rewarded by the Australian Computer Society who accepted her as a Fellow of that organisation in 2005.

Evelyn is widely published as editor and/or contributor to 48 books, numerous refereed and non refereed journal publications and conference proceedings. She has been an invited keynote speaker and presenter to numerous conferences and workshops. Her official title when she retired from CQU was: Evelyn J. S. Hovenga RN, PhD, FCHSE, FRCNA, FACHI, FACS; Professor, Health Informatics; Head, School of Management and Information Systems, Faculty of Business & Information. "Throughout my career I have been interested in and contributed to the promotion of health informatics education."

eHealth Education

Evelyn established an independent consulting and training organisation, eHealth Education Pty Ltd, with colleagues Heather Grain and Joan Edgecumbe, in 2008 for which she continues to work as the CEO Director, Company secretary, Professor, and Trainer: "I completed a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment in 2010 and have been involved in the Vocational Education Sector since mid 2010 as RTO manager and trainer." She has recently been appointed as one of three Directors of a not-for-profit Trust, the Global eHealth Collaborative (GeHCo) that aims to work collaboratively with experts and organisations from around the world to enable a global health workforce to use data and information technologies in partnership with consumers in a manner that facilitates the delivery of safe, cost effective and sustainable healthcare services.

Evelyn Hovenga, 2015.
www.evelynhovenga.com

Steve Kozlowski, Anna Frost (Vennik), Rob, Evelyn Hovenga (Vroom), 50th reunion, 2006.

Anna Frost nee Vennik: Homemaker

My family is of Dutch origin and we came from Rotterdam to Australia in 1955 as assisted migrants under the Australian and Netherlands governments' migration agreement. I remember that because it was the year before the Olympic Games were held in Melbourne. My father was Pieter Vennik and my mother was Femmigje Mulder. I was born in 1944 and was ten-and-a-half years old the day we left home, and I am now 68. There were six of us who migrated - as well as Mum and Dad there were my brother Jan who was the oldest of the children, my older sister Cornelia and my younger sister Geesje. My other brother Peter and sister Hilda were born in Australia.

The only person that my father knew in Australia was a man in Perth, which wasn't much help when we came to Victoria. The conditions of the supported migration scheme meant that my dad had to work for two years in the jobs that were arranged for him by the government. We first went to Healesville and I think that was because work was available there.

Vennik family passport photos, 1955

My dad was a cabinetmaker and French polisher and I still have some tables and chairs that he made. Dad had done some training as an electrician and then cabinetmaking, but was told that in Australia he might have to work in a semi-skilled capacity. My sister Corry was quite well educated and had started working in Rotterdam as an apprentice saleswoman, but the only job that was available for her was in the Healesville laundry, which is still there. My Dad and my sister Corrie had already learnt some English but the rest of us didn't. Another condition of the migration scheme was that we had to learn to speak English.

Then we moved to 59 McArthur Avenue at St Albans and my father worked at Sunshine Cabinet Works. My parents tried to start a business on their own but they didn't have the money so that's why he ended up working for Sunshine Cabinet Works. He also built the rest of the house as we lived there.

Vennik family (L-R): Peter, Jan, Corry, Geesje (in front), Pieter, Anna, Femmigje.

When I started at St Albans High School the headmaster was Mr James Barker. Mr and Mrs Barker were an English couple, I believe, and lived near the school on Main Road East. I stayed at High School until I was 14 and then it was off to work in the textile industry where my sister Corrie was employed.

Mum's house in the front room had an organ and a piano. I learnt piano when I was small but my brother was more proficient. My brother died of Chron's disease, which is chronic inflammation of the intestines. He died in 1960 at the age of 22. He had an operation and ended up dying of blood poisoning. He played the piano and we've always had a piano or an organ in the family. My father could play and he encouraged us to learn. I still have a piano but I seldom try playing these days as I'm out of practice and the piano is out of tune.

Marriage

Mum and dad met when they were aged 17 year but when I was at that age and keen on a boy my parents thought I was much too young for a boyfriend. I became engaged to Ross Alan Frost in June 1965. He was from Ascot Vale and the only son in his family. We married in the St Albans Presbyterian Church, which was one of the first churches built in St Albans. It is now known as the St Albans Uniting Church.

Evelyn Vroom was a bridesmaid at my wedding. She was living in Leonard Avenue and was a bright girl at school. When she came to St Albans High she didn't speak much English so the teacher paired her with me because I could speak Dutch. Evelyn picked up the language quite quickly and you could see she was going to succeed educationally. She has ended up as a professor of nursing in Queensland but still has a unit near the railway station. I was bridesmaid for her wedding to Ken Hovenga – they had two girls.

There were other Dutch families who settled locally. Henry van der Kruys drowned while trying to save a child at the St Albans swimming hole and his wife Maria had to bring up eight children on her own. At least the whole community rallied to provide some financial support through their crisis. Another family was burnt out. A Dutch club was formed in St Albans to help people make friends and socialise especially for the wives who were stuck at home on their own during the day. They used to have singalongs and hold Christmas functions.

Martin Los was an optician and ran a small business from his home on the corner of Main Road East and Oberon Ave. Mr Coort was an auto electrician and had his workshop in Main Road West.

Mr Elzinga and his family also migrated from the Netherlands. They moved to the Footscray area before their home was built in St Albans. That was in the early fifties. He was as painter by trade and worked at a paint shop in St Albans. His first name was Fonger and his wife was Sjoukje, so they became known as Fred and Jill. I believe they had two daughters and a son. They were connected with the Presbyterian church in East Esplanade where I was married.

I remember Mrs Agnes Stevens was a lovely and generous woman who worked very hard as a volunteer. She gave us woollen blankets against the cold and I've heard that she helped many people through her work with the school and the church. Her sons John and Doug were also nice and they were also helping people in the area. They became local businessmen and real estate agents.

I experienced health problems when I was in my twenties. A year before I got married I had a range of symptoms that were diagnosed as depression but persisted so I went for a second opinion. At the age of 22 I was given a week to live because I had a swelling the size of a tennis ball on the brain. At first they thought they couldn't operate and the only thing they could do was radiation treatment and drain it but in the end they decided to operate. I had two operations – one lasted 14 hours and the other 9 hours. I survived but it effected my speech permanently. Nevertheless I got married and had two children.

We bought our first block of land in Sydenham in 1964. We used to go for drives up there to have a look at it and plan what we would do with it … but there was nothing there! We ended selling it to someone who bought it as an investment. Now there is so much development out there it is hard to believe how quickly the time has gone.

After I finished my high school years I worked for 11 years in office, then married and had two children. I went back to work after 8 years and then worked for 26 years as a disability carer for the Moonee Valley council. I am now retired for some years, so I've had just a very ordinary life!

My mother died in 2001 at the age of 84 and my father in 2005 at the age of 89 and they are both buried at Altona. One of their ambitions had been to go back to visit Holland, which they did and really enjoyed it. I have their photograph that was all posed in a studio with them dressed in folk costume: Mum in clogs, bonnet and striped skirts sitting at the spinning wheel, and Dad standing beside her in his beanie and long-stemmed pipe holding a cane basket. It's a nice, happy memory of them.

These day days I am a widow and retired to a nice unit in Taylors Lakes, which is all built up but it was all empty paddocks when were first went looking for land out in Sydenham. I enjoy catching up with my old school friends and go the school reunions when I can. I still have a piano but it is badly out of tune as I seldom have the time to practice.

I still see Evelyn whenever she comes down to Melbourne as we have remained friends. She's done rather well for herself academically since her start at the high school. She trained as a nurse and kept doing more and more courses and is now a Professor at the Queensland University. She's been there for years and is an expert on computer information systems for nurses.

Anna Frost nee Vennik, 2012