

EMILIJA KRIKSCIUNAS : MATHEMATICS TEACHER, 1961-1968



The Kriksciunas family came to Australia on the M/S Nelly as Displaced Persons in September 1949, under the auspices of the International Refugee Organisation's Group Resettlement Program to Australia. They had been accepted for permanent residency. The family consisted of Emilija (age 27), Juozas (age 25) and Algis (age 1). They were Lithuanian nationals but immediately prior to emigration they had been residing at Tübingen, Germany.

Emilija was born in 1922 in Latvia in Liepāja, which is a port city on Latvia's west coast. Her parents were Petras Gaidelionis and Ona Gaidelioniene. Her entry papers to Australia describe her as being blond-haired and blue-eyed.



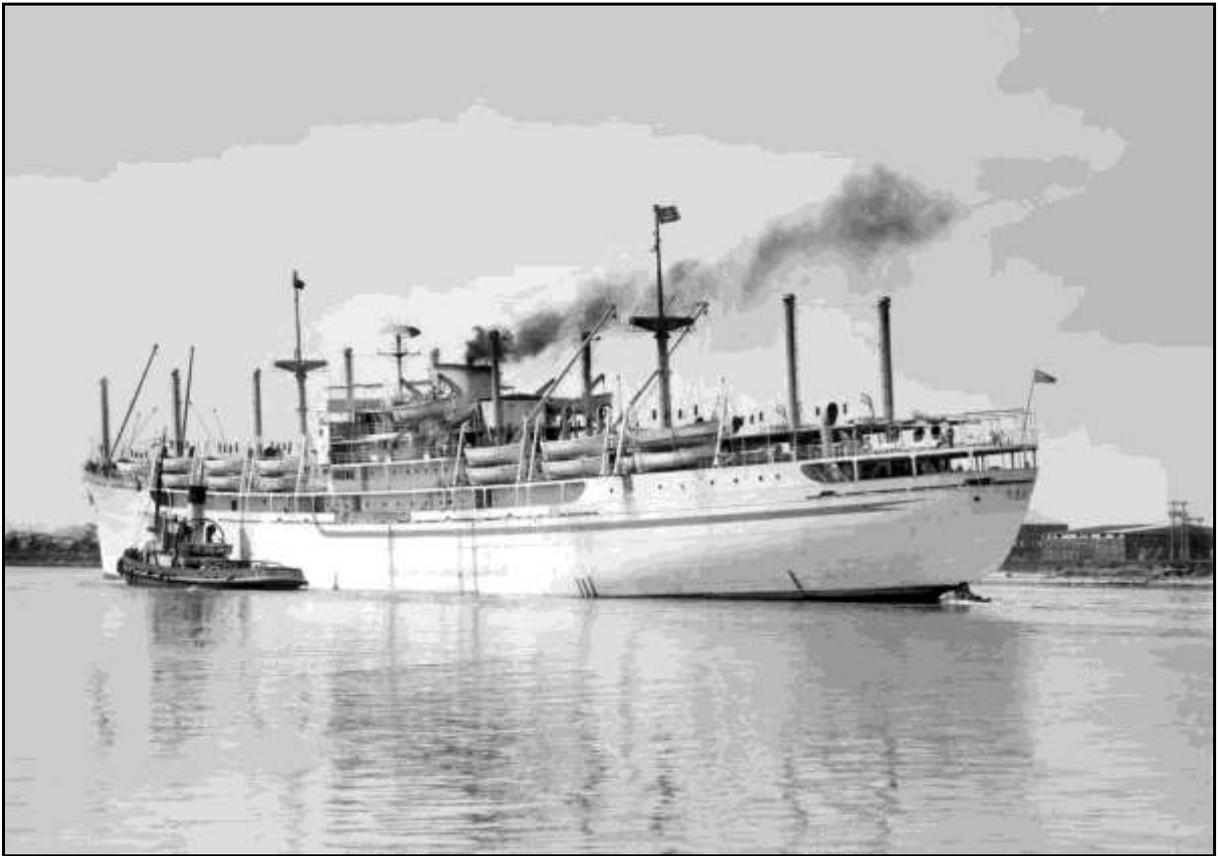
Juozas was born in 1922 in Lithuania in the small town of Lazdijai located about seven kilometres east of the border with Poland. He was described as being blue-eyed with dark hair. The young family thus fulfilled the desirable image of "Beautiful Balts" that Australia was trying to attract to its shores after the end of World War Two.

The family were separated after arrival. Emilija and her son were accommodated at the Department of Immigration Holding Centre in Woodside, South Australia, while Juozas was sent to work for Mr L Dohnt of Nangwarry near Mt Gambier. Mr Dohnt managed a well-established business as a logging contractor and also had a vineyard at Penola. Undoubtedly Juozas was sent there to work most probably as a labourer, though his listed occupation was a driver. When the family moved to Victoria he worked as a labourer before obtaining a position as a metal worker.

Emilija and Juozas' second son, Peter, was born in 1950 at the Mount Gambier Hospital and was the last baby born at the hospital for that year, on 31 December. At this stage the family was living in Yahl, a suburb of Mount Gambier. (Border Watch, Mt Gambier, 4 January 1951, p1)

Emilija and Juozas became naturalised British subjects at Mt Gambier in 1956. Emilija expanded her childcare and housewife roles by enrolling in a teacher-training course.

It is not known when the family moved to Victoria, possibly in the late 1950s. By the early 1960s they were living in Brighton and stayed there at for at least that decade. The boys appear to have attended Brighton High school as Peter was there in 1966. The family moved to Moorabbin in the early 1970s.



M/S Nelly at Melbourne 1949 <https://www.shipsnostalgia.com/media/nelly.337720>



Emilija obtained a teaching position at St Albans High School in 1961. Her qualifications were listed as university subjects and a Trained Teachers Certificate from South Australia. She may have obtained her university subject overseas (as did other teachers at the school) but that has not been traced. At this time it was not unusual even for the Australian-born teachers to have their qualification listed as “Uni Subs”.

The school started in 1956 in Sunshine and transferred to St Albans in 1957 as the first local secondary school. In 1961 the school had 900 students and 35 teaching staff – 12 females and 23 males – and two female office staff.

The St Albans population was about 7,000 people, so the high school students represented 12% of the township.

Emilija taught at the St Albans between 1961 and 1968, one of the several migrant teachers in the maths/sciences stream over the decade who were remembered for their dedication and passion.



1962 staff - Mrs Kriksciunas is second row third from right.



Mrs Kriksciunas with Form 1L, 1962.

Barry Rayner recalled that there were several migrant teachers who did a wonderful job, in particular Mrs Kriksciunas, Mrs Burden, Nick Bolvari, and Paul Pavlov.

Joan Butler-Rayner remembered Emilija as having interests broader than routine classroom lessons: "Mrs Kriksciunas and Sandra Crofts organised evening theatre visits for students, which was quite outside the organised school curriculum but introduced students to a wider experience of the arts."

Sandra Hatch-Crofts: "Mrs Kriksciunas and I would sometimes organise theatre visits for students, which was outside of the normal school curriculum and gave students a broader introduction to the arts. Some of the younger, single teachers stayed after school and socialised with each other and senior students. There was even the occasional joint attendance at social events such as the football club ball in 1967."



Mrs Kriksciunas and class 1967.

By 1977 the family had moved to Moorabbin and Emilija was still working as a teacher. Unfortunately, no information about their life at this stage has been found.

Emilija Kriksciunas passed away in April 2004, aged 81 years. Loved wife of Juozas. Loved mother to Algis and Peter. Loved grandmother to Tara and Christopher. Loved mother-in-law to Helen. Will always be lovingly remembered and be forever in our hearts. In accordance with Emilija's wishes a private family cremation was held. (Published by Legacy Remembers in April 2004.)



Mrs Kriksciunas and Form 5, 1968