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Family Background

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.

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 privileged 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.

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 Bevez) 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 Benzotropines. 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. Unfortunately, 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.