



My Life Up To Now

by Stuart Rodda

My life began in Geelong, a town I remain faithful to, through my love of the Footy team and the city itself. Fate brought me via Footscray to Albion, then a little-known outer western suburb close to the expanding areas of Deer Park and St Albans. The latter suburbs were home to large numbers of post-World War 2 migrants, mainly Europeans, and St Albans High School had just been established to cater for the young families of those areas. The school started in some halls before a main building and temporary classrooms could be assembled on the present site of the school, which was bordered on two sides by open fields.

On finishing primary education at Albion State School, I was allocated to travel to St Albans High by zoning rules even though Sunshine High was much closer. This was pivotal in my appreciation of cultures other than the dominant Anglo Australian culture of the time. I also benefited from the efforts of a diverse team of older experienced, young inexperienced, and migrant teachers who had chosen or were assigned to the fledgling high school. St Albans was probably seen as less prestigious than many schools in the area but soon excelled in certain sports (e.g. volleyball) due to the European influence, and academically due to the drive of young teachers and competitive students. It was thus that I managed to come top of the State in Physics, under the guidance of my teacher Barry Rayner, and to be among the

top students in aggregate score with good results in chemistry and maths.



It seemed a no-brainer that I could choose any University course I liked, with multiple offers of scholarships, but I chose a biology-related course at Melbourne Uni, after securing a lucrative scholarship with the Commonwealth Serum Labs (CSL), despite knowing next to nothing about biology. My decision was driven partly by need, as my parents could not support me, and the scholarship led to a guaranteed job at the end, like many in those days.

I completed my Uni course with honors in all subjects and started work at CSL. This was to be my first full time job and also the last job I ever commenced; over a 40 year career, I worked for around 5 companies in many roles but never left any of them. The ownership and business models of my employer changed around me, and I adapted to each change without ever having to resign or look for a new job.

After the first four years with CSL as a Biochemist, I managed to get CSL's support to return to Melbourne University and

complete a Ph.D. in Viral Immunology under internationally renowned Professor David White. I was now a Virologist! Researching influenza vaccines became my life for some years until I was offered a chance to join a new research team exploring synthetic vaccines. I jumped at the chance and that set the course of my career for the next twenty years. The 1980's and 1990's were a fast-changing world where discoveries in immunology and genetics opened up new vistas in our understanding of human biology. I was able to make a small contribution to the field of immune recognition by T cells and B cells, which are critical to the effectiveness of our immunity to many potentially harmful viruses and other microorganisms. I was now an Immunologist! However, much of the research I was doing involved chemical synthesis of peptides (small bits of protein), so my chemistry training from University was very useful. I was thus also a Chemist! My employer had morphed to be a manufacturer of research tools for scientists worldwide, and I became a "Technical Expert" in the use of peptides in research, helping with design and promotion of products. I was now a Marketing Person! Over time, my employer reduced the research component of the business until we were more of a manufacturing/sales organisation, and I was given responsibility for sales of peptide products. I was now a Salesman! But as I had never intended to be a salesman, I decided to seek an honourable exit to my working life, and was fortunate enough to have saved enough to retire at 57 years of age, despite my wife Christine and I having raised 3 wonderful children, all of whom had professional careers well in hand.



Since that time in 2004, I have had the luxury of pursuing my interests, with travel, gardening, reading, volunteer work, and family duties being the major part of my life. My travels have included two visits to St Albans in the UK, an interesting and ancient town where Alban, the Roman soldier later made a saint, is said to have been responsible for at least two miracles after defending early Christians from persecution. I also indulge in sports, investing, and further education, not to mention helping with house renovations for my eldest son. Having four grandchildren (and now being 68 years old), life is pretty full for me and I am looking forward to many more happy and healthy years ahead.

I still keep in contact with my St Albans High mentor Barry Rayner and some school friends.



Summarizing my working career, I was a biochemist, a virologist, an immunologist, a chemist, a technical expert, a marketer and a salesman. I published 20 or so articles and retired when I was ready, while looking after my health and the welfare of my family. I consider that I have had a life well lived and that good fortune has always come my way through no special merit of my own, except that when an opportunity came along I was prepared to grab it. Let that be your take-home message – always be prepared to back yourself, to take a measured risk, and to work hard towards what you want.