

EDITE STURESTEPS: HISTORY AND GERMAN TEACHER, 1959-1975



Edite "Edith" Imgarde Sturesteps was born in 1904, a Latvian national who arrived in Australia in 1949 at Fremantle on the Oxfordshire which had departed from Naples with 672 passengers.

Edite was a displaced person originally from Riga/Latvia, aged 45, divorced, and her religion is listed as Protestant. There is some speculation that she might have been a Holocaust survivor during the occupation of Latvia in the early 1940s when thousands of Jews and Gypsies were murdered, including civilians whose political opinions and activity were unacceptable to the occupiers. Also, thousands of German and Austrian Jews were deported to the Riga ghetto.

Edite Sturesteps had been a teacher in Latvia with university qualifications as Magistra in History. (Obtaining the Magister/Magistra required five years of study with coursework and a final thesis.) Edite was accompanied by her eight-year-old son Osvalds George Sturesteps. They were transferred to the Department of Immigration holding centre at Benalla, which had been recently established:

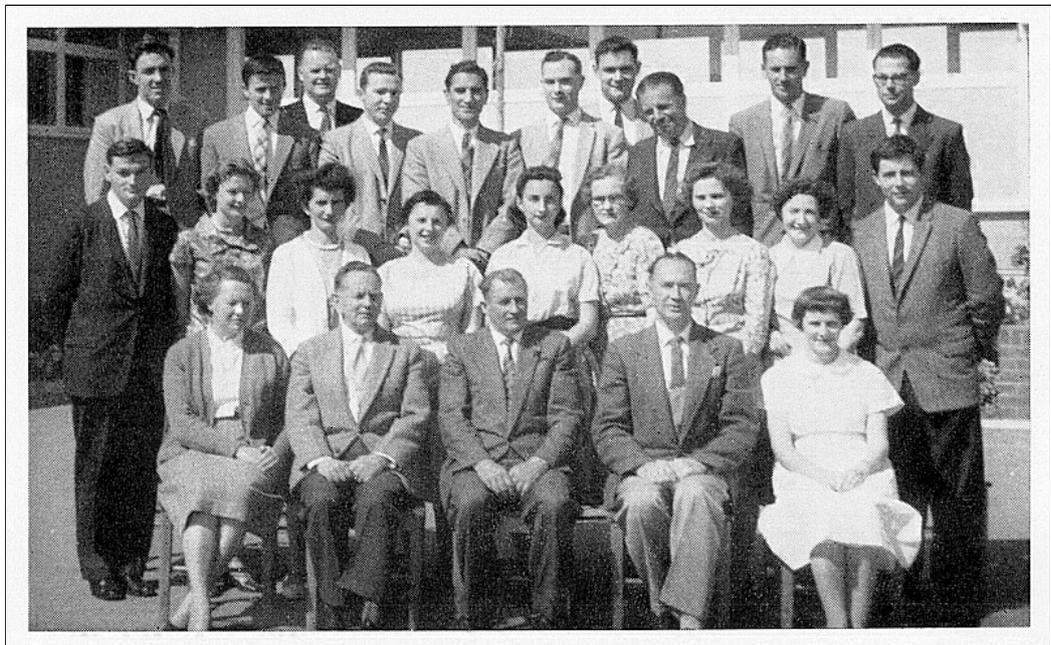
"Benalla's Migrant Accommodation Centre opened in June 1949. In 1941 an air-training school was opened at Benalla Airport known as No 11 Elementary Flying School. During the post-war years, the former air-training site became a migrant holding camp and eventually became a housing commission estate. The migrant camp could hold as many as 800 people at any one time. When the camp closed in late 1967, it was estimated that 60,000 people, mainly from southern and eastern Europe, had spent time there. The old migrant camp is located just off Samaria Road, behind Benalla Airport."

The settlement connection with the airport was reinforced when Ozvalds George started his schooling at the Benalla Aerodrome School. He later became known as George Ozvalds, which is much more familiar in the Australian vernacular.

Edite Sturesteps became a naturalized citizen in 1957. In 1958, a decade after arriving in Australia, she was still based at the Benalla Migrant Accommodation Centre and was working as a storewoman. In 1959 she started working as a teacher at St Albans, which appears to have been her first appointment in Victoria's education system, so it had taken her a decade to transition from her assigned blue-collar work to her former teaching career. The decade no doubt enabled her to refine her English language skills.

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1959 staff, Mrs Sturesteps is in second row, fourth from right.



Edite probably started at St Albans in 1959 because that is the first time that she was included in the school magazine; she would have been aged about 55 years, one of the older teachers at the school. She was probably the first teacher of German at St Albans because German, Italian and Russian classes at the school started in 1959. Hannelore Henschke started at St Albans in 1959 and was likely one of Edite's students - Hannelore attained an Exhibition (top in the state) for German in 1963, which must have been pleasing for student, teacher and school.

Mrs Sturesteps was still there in 1975 according to Bruce Alcorn, when he wrote about the school's jubilee, stating that she was a maternal figure in classroom and staffroom and much respected, being a capable teacher of German and history. She would have been aged about 70 in 1975 and might have been contemplating retirement.

She was living in Richmond in the 1960s and was still there two decades later, so that was undoubtedly her permanent home address.

Mrs Edite Imgarde Sturesteps died in 1986. The funeral service was held at Tobin Brothers Chapel in Doncaster Road. Her remains were buried at the Springvale Botanical Cemetery.

Her son, George Osvalds Sturesteps, died in August 2019 at age 77 and was buried at the Springvale Botanical Cemetery. He was the husband of Beryl and father of Tony and Ashley (dec).

Remembering Mrs Sturesteps

Lorna Cameron: The locally trained teachers would mostly have been aged about 30, with the overseas ones being older, with Mrs Sturesteps being the eldest. Sturesteps would have been in her mid-50s whereas some of the younger teachers were in their early-20s.

Ludmila Pavlova: Mrs Sturesteps was a poor soul. She had finished studies in the faculty of history in Latvia, which included modern and ancient history. She complained that she knew all about the Greeks but never knew what kind of bread they ate in the morning, which is what the current books were writing about. Years later you thought of her with a smile. Underneath it all she was very kind.

Jan Tully (Rawlins): Sturesteps was our German teacher. She always wore cardigans or long-sleeved dresses on very hot days. One day I was asked by a teacher to take a note to her during lunch-time and I walked into her empty classroom unexpectedly. I noticed there was a number tattooed on her arm immediately and she quickly pulled down her sleeve.

Phillip Spivey: When I think back to some of the teachers at St Albans ... Even though she had her own idiosyncracies, Mrs Sturesteps was helpful. I've always been interested in history and she's the one who inspired me to keep going.

Henry Goralski: 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.*"

Joe Ribarow: The first year was also loaded with decisions: do you want to study French, or German? I chose German because some of the families in my neighbourhood spoke the language. So here I was in Grade 1C trying to learn the intricacies of masculine, feminine and neuter endings in the nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive cases under the guidance and sometimes failing patience of Mrs Sturesteps - you'd have to have patience to put up with the rowdy behaviour that developed once the awe of a new school and new teachers had diminished. We were a class of nearly 40 students . . . With such large class numbers, it must have been impossible to give any attention to individual learning needs. Mrs Sturesteps clearly loved the subject much more than many of her reluctant and recalcitrant students did, but she persevered.



Bob Barker: Frau Sturesteps sticks in my mind because she was one of the German teachers along with Mr Ziemelis. Mrs Sturesteps was of Latvian nationality and was in her fifties so she must have been one of the older members on staff. When you started at high school you had to select either French or German as your language study and I chose German because I thought it might be easier to pronounce. These days children start learning other languages in primary school but that wasn't the practice in our era. I think that we students gave Mrs Sturesteps a hard time because she wasn't the strict disciplinarian that other teachers were. She gave me some good marks one year. In fact she gave me the top mark in the class for reading in German, which was

above the marks received by some of the German kids in the class. I think it was because they were reading very casually in their regional accents whereas I was a non-German who was really trying to pronounce it properly. But when it came to the German grammar and all the declensions I really lost it. I found it hard to understand how the grammar worked, and there were lots of *der, die, das, dem, die, das*; it just went on and on. Although I liked studying German I lost interest in the subject because I couldn't get round the grammar ... The German kids just waltzed through it.



1971 staff - Mrs Sturesteps is second from left in third row.

Article written by Joseph Ribarow.

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