

# NICHOLAS BOLVARI: MULTI-TALENTED FRENCH TEACHER, 1963-1966



Nicholas Bolvari was born in June 1920 in Budapest, Hungary, to Gergely Bago and Maria Fuis. Nicholas studied theology with the aim of become a priest originally, but in his own words “I liked women better than the priesthood.” He married and had two children by his first wife, but both children were stillborn, which may have contributed to the divorce of the couple.

Nicholas Bolvari’s original name was Mihaly Miklos Bolvari Bago. His father’s surname was Bago but the family decided for complicated reasons unknown to adopt the Bolvari surname. When Nicholas Bolvari came to Australia, he changed the last letter of his surname to a ‘y’ as the Italian community assumed that he was Italian and wished him to join them. This assumption was further fostered by the fact that he spoke

reasonably fluent Italian and also taught this later in schools. He Anglicized his name for various reasons to Nicholas Michael Bolvary after swapping the Michael (Mihaly) to Miklos (Nicholas), as it was easier for Australians to remember and pronounce.

Bolvari left Hungary because of the political unrest which led to the Hungarian revolution. The Soviet Union occupied Hungary in 1944 and imposed hard conditions. Bolvari was involved in various war occupations but his later family stated the stories are too painful to narrate. He ended up as a Displaced Person in Villach, Austria. In 1949 he was in Naples on his way for resettlement in Australia. He arrived in Fremantle per Skaugum in January 1950 as Miklos Bolvari. He was on his own, a divorced Catholic, aged 29, and his occupation was listed as a clerk and landworker.

His movements and allocated work arrangement after arriving at Fremantle are unknown; usually the person was assigned to a migrant hostel and had to work as directed by the authorities for two years. Nicholas had lived in Sydney for a while where he ran a cake-making shop with a partner for a few years. He was living in Melbourne by the mid-1950s.

The great majority of Hungarians who were accepted as Displaced Persons under the mass resettlement scheme to Australia came in 1949 and 1950 – there were 10,400 people who came in this period, representing 87% of all Hungarian arrivals to Australia between 1947 and 1954. After the Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolt in 1956, the Australian Government offered settlement assistance to a further 14,000 Hungarian refugees.

The Hungarian diaspora in Melbourne started organising themselves soon after arriving. There was a Hungarian guest house or boarding house in Melbourne in the early 1950s. The first Hungarian Society was formed in 1954 and the first Hungarian House as a community centre was established in Richmond in 1957. The Hungarian Reformed Church held services in Fitzroy at the Presbyterian Church in Napier Street. The first ethnic Hungarian festival took place in Melbourne in 1964 and Bolvari was a part of the entertainment as a leading bass baritone.

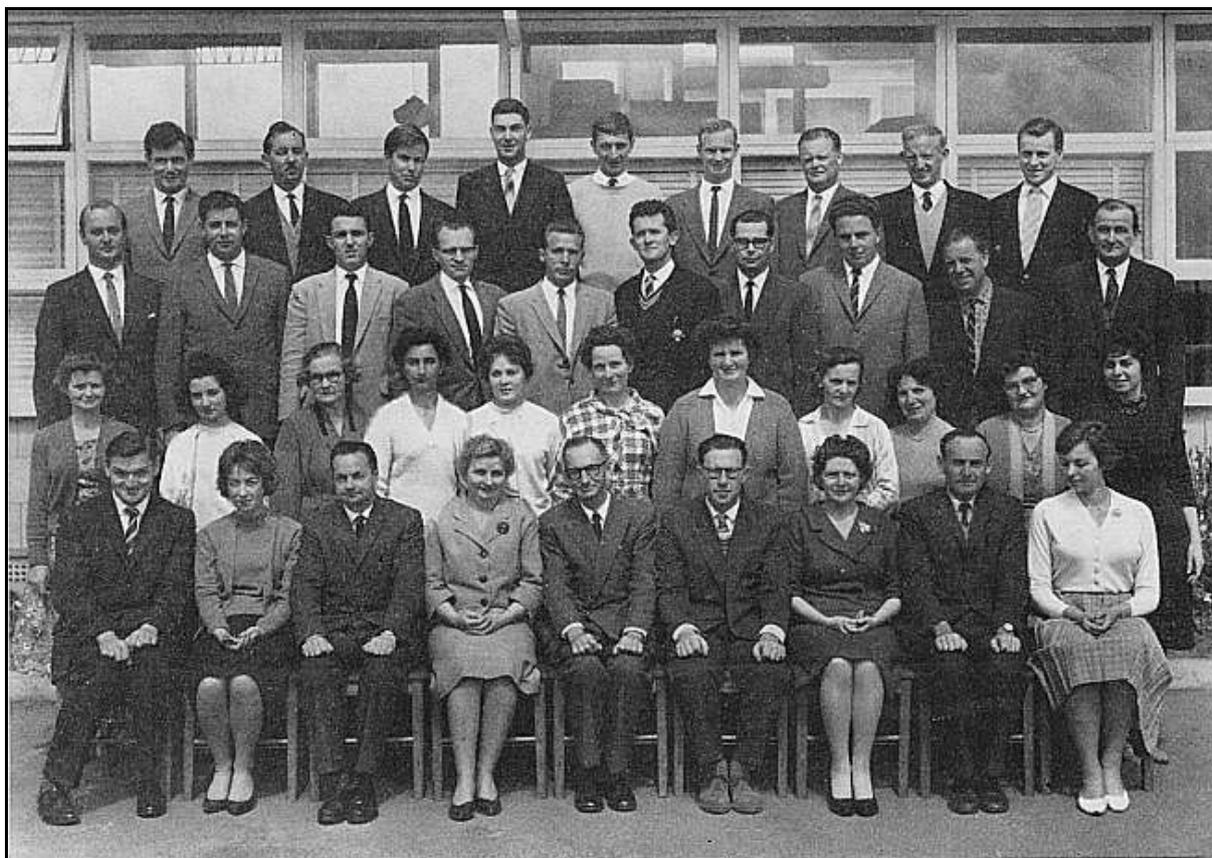
The Hungary-born community of Victoria peaked by 1961 at 10,700 but has decreased since then, with 5,000 people recorded in 2016. In 1986, St Albans had 115 people who were born in Hungary, representing just 0.2% of the local population. In comparison, the larger of the overseas-born cohorts were people from the former-Yugoslavia 5,200 (10.5%) and Malta 4,600 (9.3%.) Years later the St Albans’ Hungarians established their Senior Citizens club that still meets at the St Albans Community Centre.

Nicholas Bolvari married Maria Kamaris in 1957. Maria was of Hungarian nationality and

emigrated to Australia in 1957 under the Hungarian Refugee Assisted scheme. They were both Roman Catholics and wanted to get married in church, but were forced to marry in a registry office as the church did not condone divorce so they could not sanction a church wedding.

Bolvari became a naturalised citizen in 1957 under the name Miklos Mihaly Albert Bolvari, with a contact address care of the East Melbourne Post Office. His family do not know where the 'Albert' addition came from as that was not part of his name. The name started out as Mihaly Miklos Bago in Hungary, was changed to Miklos Mihaly Bolvari (also in Hungary), and when he came to Australia it was further changed to Miklos Mihaly Bolvary (Nicholas Michael Bolvary).

In 1958 Nicholas Michael A Bolvary and Maria Bolvary were living in Kew and he worked in town (Melbourne) as an engraver. He had also worked as a locksmith but when and where this occurred is not recorded. When he was teaching at St Albans High he organised the allocation of lockers and keys for school users and had a group of students as locker and key monitors responding to student's routine problems such as lost keys. He also organised master locks for the school buildings.



Front: Mr. G. Reid, Miss V. Fenelon, Mr. J. Everson, Miss E. S. Taylor (Senior Mistress),  
Mr. M. H. Wilkinson (Head Master), Mr. G. H. Strauss (Senior Master), Miss G. M. Bowles,  
Mr. L. E. Burchell, Miss R. Meyer (Physc.).  
Second row: Mrs. J. Cox (Sec.), Miss H. Eadie, Mrs. E. Sturesteps, Mrs. L. Pavlova, Miss G. E. Coutts,  
Mrs. J. Fleider, Mrs. L. Cameron, Mrs. Kriksctunas, Mrs. M. Burden, Mrs. S. Hudson (Sec.),  
Miss R. Bechler (Psych.).  
Third row: Mr. E. Youd, Mr. J. Morieson, Mr. D. Hill, Mr. F. Schiller, Mr. P. Pavlov, Mr. L. King,  
Mr. G. Sacharonok, Mr. I. M. Smith, Mr. T. Walsh, Mr. G. G. Gibson.  
Back: Mr. J. D. Conroy, Mr. N. Bolvari, Mr. J. Mott, Mr. J. Hunt, Mr. T. G. Scarff, Mr. R. Robertson,  
Mr. K. Chilton, Mr. K. Robertson, Mr. E. Ford. Absent: Miss M. T. O'Connor.

1961 Staff, Bolvari in last row second from left.

Bolvaria started teaching French at St Albans High School in 1961. He spoke at least eight languages, which was undoubtedly a benefit at parent-teacher nights in St Albans, because the school's enrolment consisted of over 30 nationalities. There were not many Hungarian students at the school though one of the earliest ones was Rosemary Kiss who was one of "the most academic-minded students one could wish to have in a school" and did well academically, worked as a public servant, lectured

at Melbourne University, was active in local government, and became an arts philanthropist on retirement.

In 1963 Nicholas Michael Bolvari was living in Beaver Street St Albans, just around the corner from the High School where he was teaching. Luba Szwed remembers him as being a friendly neighbour: “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.”



Bolvari with Form 1F, 1962.

In 1964 the school started raising funds to build a school assembly hall, which for students meant holding raffles and white-elephant jumble sale monster fetes, and anything else they could think of. As his contribution, Bolvari organised a weekly French crossword puzzle competition with prizes and bragging rights for the winners.

German Translation.  
**ENGLISH UNTERRICHT**  
Jeden Montag und Mittwoch  
Abend, von 7 bis 9 Uhr abends wird  
in der St Albans High School Eng-  
lish unterrichtet.  
Es sind zwei Klassen — eine für  
Anfänger und eine für die Fort-  
geschrittenen.  
Der Unterricht ist gratis und alle  
Erwachsenen Einwanderer, denen  
es interessiert English zu lernen,  
sind herzlich eingeladen.  
Herr M. Bolvary, ein Lehrer der  
St Albans High School ist in der  
Schule (Raum 31), im südlichen  
Gebäude abends um 7 Uhr Mon-  
tags oder Mittwochs zu sprechen.

His community contribution that year was teaching English. On Monday and Wednesday evenings from 7 to 9pm Mr Bolvari was teaching English to local residents. There were two classes, one for beginners and one for advanced students. The publicity information was translated into German in one of the school publications (Calling All Parents May 1964) so it might have been targeting German speakers, which is not surprising as Bolvari spoke German fluently.

It is not clear when he left St Albans High as there were no annual school magazines published in the years 1964-1966. He is not listed amongst the 1967 staff.

Bolvari's extra curricula activity was taking charge of locks and lockers and he recruited a team of student volunteers to carry out the routine tasks. Nick Szwed and

Joe Ribarow were key and locker monitors under Bolvari's guidance during the mid-1960s. There was a little office at the back of a classroom that was set up with locksmith equipment and it was here that duplicate keys were cut and master keys made.

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Bolvari also participated in theatrical events. In 1964 he was the bass baritone narrating, in song, the legend of the White Elk, as part of the Hungarian Art Festival in Melbourne, which about 7,000 people saw at three performances. The festival was produced by the famous ballet artist Kalman Solymossy. Solymossy and his wife Elizabeth Mrongovius were Bolvari's compatriots and the families were known to socialise.

Solymossy was a renowned dancer with the Budapest Opera House who fled Hungary due to his participation in the 1956 revolution. He came to Melbourne in



1958 and became involved with the Victorian Hungarian Association and the Richmond Hungarian House. They arranged performances at venues such as the Fitzroy and Prahran town halls. He founded the Solymossy Ballet and Music Academy which started in the Richmond Hungarian House and became the largest dance academy in Australia with groups in some Melbourne suburbs - Mrongovius even held ballet classes at the Methodist Ladies' College in Hawthorn.

In 1967 Maria and Nicholas were living in Frankston. In 1980 Nicholas Bolvary was still working as a teacher and living in Oakleigh with Maria (home duties), Andrew (process worker), and Nicholas Gregory (factory hand).

Nicholas Bolvary died in October 2010 aged 90 years and was buried at the Springvale Botanical Cemetery.

On reflection, his family say that Nicholas Bolvai was much more than a teacher of French. His son, Miklos Bolvari, writes:

“He spoke at least eight languages - I remember Hungarian, English, Italian, German, French, Latin, some Yugoslav and White Russian (which was the language of the Russian aristocracy). In his later years, he attempted to learn Japanese but by that time it was far too difficult for his memory. He also taught

Geography, History, Religious Education and most of the languages that he spoke. I always spoke to him about putting down his life in a book but he said it was too hard to make a living and do that as well. He was a good cook and he taught my mother to do that early on in the marriage whereupon he put his nose to the grindstone and tried to keep our place to live. He was good at cakemaking, cooking, singing, engraving, teaching, stage comedy, scriptwriting and so much more."



Teaching staff 1963. Bolvari is in back row fifth from left.

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Article written by Miklos Bolvari and Joseph Ribarow.

Photo reproduction by Nick Szwed.

Image of Nicholas Bolvari at White Elk performance c/o National Archives of Australia.