

HELEN HOSKIN nee CZERNIK: PUBLIC SERVANT, FAMILY DAY CARER

Introduction



I was born in Melbourne in 1951. My parents came to Australia in March 1950 with my brother Otto, who was 16 months old. My mother was Annelise Hellmuth (born in 1927) and my father Wladimir Czernik (born in 1911). Mum was German and Dad was Polish-Ukrainian. He met Mum after the war in Germany.

Our Home

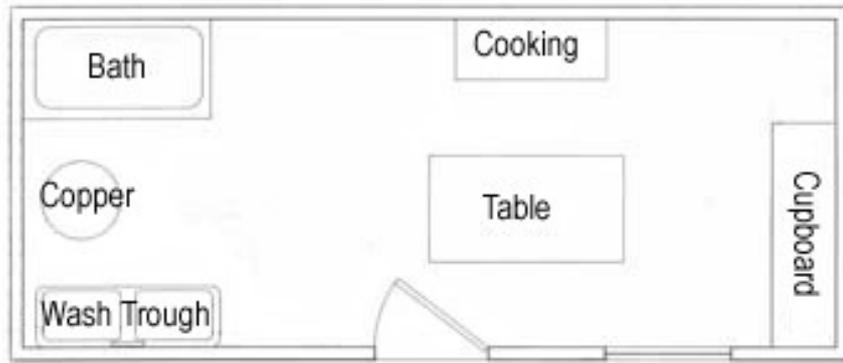
After arriving in Australia the family first lived in migrant camps at Bonegilla and Broadmeadows, then moved to 149 Fox Street, St Albans. We lived in a bungalow which was only the sleeping quarters of two bedrooms for the four of us.

Dad slowly built onto the bungalow. It still amazes me how he knew what to do. Nothing seemed too difficult: building the frame, putting in windows, doors, plastering, plumbing, and flooring. It all seemed to come naturally.



Then we had a one-room shed that comprised of a kitchen, bathroom, and laundry. It was made mostly of cement sheet and didn't have much room so it got pretty crowded with everything and everybody in there. I still remember the kitchen table which Dad obviously put together - definitely not your modern table with elegant legs and matching chairs. Mum would boil the water in the copper for us to use the bath and do the washing.

I don't remember a fridge or cooking facilities. And naturally we had the outside dunny, waste being collected once a week.



Childhood Memories

The good memories of my childhood include always having neighbouring children to play with. Fox Street back then was an unmade road and with not many cars around we could play there safely. (My parents never had a car.)

My family was very sociable so we often had other families visiting us. I still recall dad putting on records, the old 78s. Memories flood back if you happen to hear one of those songs, mainly in German.

Mum had a great garden of vegies and flowers. She always kept chickens and slaughtered them herself. After she'd killed them she'd dunk them into hot water to make plucking easier. I still remember that smell of wet feathers - not nice.

Billy carts were a big thing - all in a row we would go on adventures, taking our snacks with us (usually one biscuit). When I look back now time had no limit.

We played ball games in the street, also played marbles, skipped, and rode bikes. Of course we had no TV, so we made our own fun. I think I was about twelve when we finally got a TV.



Otto and Helen Czernik, with friends in the back yard.



Helen Czernik (front right) with friends, Fox Street, 1950s.



Helen Czernik on bicycle, Fox Street, 1950s.

Primary School

I started school at the 'old' primary school in West Esplanade, unable to speak a word of English. We spoke German at home.

In Grade 1, I had an eye injured in the school yard and I was blinded in my right eye. Looking back now, there was no ambulance so the headmaster drove me home, then my mum and I walked to Doctor O'Brien's office. I was then told I needed to go to the hospital. Mum then took me to the train and we went to the Eye and Ear Hospital in the city. It makes me realise how tough we were.

I started at the North Primary School in Fox Street in Grade 2. Between our house and the school was a creek and if it rained heavily the road flooded and we were unable to get to school.



Helen Czernik (middle row, 4th from left) Grade 6, St Albans North Primary.

The only teachers I remember from that school were Mr Ginifer (after whom the railway station between St Albans and Albion was named) in Grade 5, and Mr Canning in Grade 6. One thing I remember I did in primary school was to get two shillings out of my money box without mum knowing, and buying a bag of mixed lollies. It was a large bag and I shared it with friends.



In Grade 4 we used pens with nibs that were dipped into ink, and we had little ink wells on the corner of our desk. I presume we all had turns at filling everyone's ink well.

Sport at primary school was rounders. We also learnt folk dancing. My friends at school were Stephania Osoba (she lived next door) and Marion Mueller. In Grade 6 I sat next to Vlad Lenc, whom I still see occasionally, as he married a friend of mine, Irene Jozwik.

I distinctly remember milk being delivered by horse and cart in bottles that had foil lids, and at Xmas we'd have decorated foil lids. When I was sixteen I stayed up all night at New Years Eve party and we greeted the milkman as he came along the road. The family next door had a pet magpie who followed their son everywhere. The only problem was it liked the shiny foil lids on the milk bottles and would peck them. I don't know how they resolved that problem.

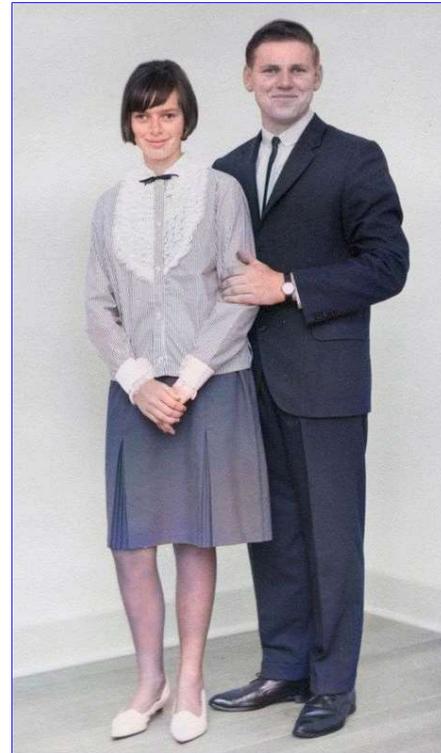
Interacting with Neighbours

Two houses up at 153 Fox Street lived the Shelley family (with two sons, Roger and Wayne) whom I befriended and became their 'daughter'. I spent many hours at their place, enjoying their company. I often think of my enjoyment there was because we saw them as being Australian (they were in fact British migrants) and had totally different values and ideas to my European parents. My father was a very controlling and generally a negative person, always worrying about what other people would think.

My mother was always anxious to keep my father happy so he wouldn't have anything to complain about - which is why I escaped to the Shelley household. In their home there was always laughter and positive energy. They also had a phone, which I would go and use. We didn't have a phone at home until I was nearly eighteen years old.



The Shelleys' life changed when Mick (dad) retired. He and Hazel (mum) moved to Torquay. (Mick and Hazel have since died.) Wayne (who is married with a son) bought the family home. Roger (the eldest son) now lives in Torquay, and I still see him occasionally.



Religion

Dad was Catholic, Mum was Lutheran. On Sundays Mum went to her church as they had a German Service. Dad made Otto and I go to the Catholic Church (he stayed at home). As we went to a state primary school we had to attend

Catholic religious instruction either after school or on Saturdays, so we could do our Communion. We eventually stopped going to Catholic Church, though I would go with Mum to her Church. I eventually got married in an Anglican Church.

Friendships

Joseph Ribarow is a friend of my bother Otto. (I think they met at secondary school.) One day Joe brought his sister, Teresa, to our home and we became friends. Teresa and I went to different primary schools but became firm friends by secondary school. Everyone should have a friend like Terrie come into their lives, someone who is always there whether you break up with your boyfriend or your husband, argue with your children or when your parents die, and many more times. She stood by and never judged me, just gently supported me until I came out the other end. Terrie is still in my life and sometimes I am sad we don't live closer, with her in Geelong and me in Emerald.

High School

What do I remember about secondary school? I made a lot of friends, Monica Chlewicki and Janina Jozwick being two with whom I am still in contact.

Uniforms, as even now, weren't favoured, either being too long or wide. I remember wearing gloves and berets with our winter uniforms, especially on excursions. We all went by train to the Olympic Pool and to the city for athletics and sport events. These were the times that uniforms had to be spot on.

Sewing and Cookery classes were my favourites, and both played major roles in my life. I continued sewing and made most of my clothes and eventually my children's. Cookery classes were well worth while as my mother's cooking skills weren't great. When I married I continued

enjoying cooking and experimenting with many recipes. I also enjoyed eating the food I prepared.

Accessing your locker between classes could be a real challenge. There were three tiers and I was lucky as I generally had one at the top. I always felt sorry for the students on the bottom level battling to get their books out past everyone's legs.



Helen Czernik (middle of third row from front) with Mrs Kriksciunas and Form 4d, 1967.

When I was at secondary school I started a part-time job on Saturdays in a shop which sold Australian souvenirs. I worked out the back sewing purses and other items made out of Kangaroo leather. The shop was a few doors down from Ungers Newsagency and next door to the record shop that did TV and radio repairs; my brother worked as an apprentice to the owner of that business.

Tracing Lost Relatives

With the help of Red Cross, my father decided to locate any living relatives, as after the war he had married my mum and stayed in Germany rather than go back to his home region which now under communist control. He eventually established contact with two brothers and discovered that he had a son from a previous marriage before the war. So, when I was twelve I discovered I had a half-brother, Frank.

For reasons I don't know, my father refused to go overseas to see his son and the Soviet authorities wouldn't allow Frank to come out to Australia and be part of our family.

My father died without ever having seen his first son. Through friends of the family Mum kept in contact with Frank and we helped him financially for many years. Eventually, I don't know how, Frank saved for a flight to Australia, but was allowed here for only three weeks. We kept him busy visiting and sightseeing. I bought Russian/Ukrainian/English dictionary, which was how we communicated with him. Frank finally got to see his father's grave and it was a very emotional time for him.

Working for the Public Service

I left secondary school at the end of Form 4 (now Year 10). I got a job with the public service with the Department of Supply as a clerical assistant. My role was lots of filing, proof reading, photo copying, and collating. I also took turns in running the switchboard, i.e. receiving incoming calls and directing them to the appropriate extension, and in being the tea lady. This meant pushing a trolley through the office and handing out coffee and tea. Over the years we eventually had women employed just to make the coffee and tea.

When I first started work we were paid fortnightly, and my pay was \$36. I used to smoke back then and a packet of Malboro cost 60c.

We had a great social life as many of us were of similar age. We had lots of celebrations at the corner hotel during our lunchtimes at there was always a twenty-first, engagement, or wedding. We often had trouble getting back to work when lunch break was over. We also socialised out of work: barbecues, football games, cricket, car rallies, or evening parties at different homes. That was also the time when Progressive Dinners were popular.

Marriage



I met my husband, David Hoskin, at work. We married in February 1972 and both continued working together for a few years. I eventually went to work for the Department of Defence. While I was still with the Department of Supply, Irene Lenc (Jozwik) came to work with us. Irene's sister was my friend at secondary school. Irene and I became good friends, and still are.

My husband and I bought a house in Oakleigh and took the train to work. We spent a lot of family time with David's Mum, Dad, his brothers and their families. I learnt a lot from these people as they were all Australians and again had a different background to my European parents.

During our time together David and I had many camping trips. We honeymooned in Tasmania. David enjoyed fishing as I would generally read a good book. We drove to Darwin, a real adventure as they'd had bad weather resulting in very muddy roads. This was before the road to Darwin was sealed. We also went to New Zealand, hiring a car in both the south and north islands. We did a lot of camping around Victoria as we both loved the outdoors and both found nature very rewarding. This was always a big adventure for me, because as a child I almost never left St Albans.

Just when I got pregnant we'd bought a ten-acre property in Emerald and sold our home in Oakleigh. Living in Emerald was beautiful but to get to our jobs in the city was very time consuming. We'd get up at 5:30am to be in the city just after 8:00am. We found driving to Belgrave then catching the train, which took one hour ten minutes, the best way. I'd either read or knit on the journey. At one stage David and another guy played Backgammon on the journey. (They had many interested onlookers.)

I left work to have Emily, born in August 1979, so I had completed ten years in the public service.

Weekends on the ten acres were spent picking Proteas and foliage, which we bunched and the sold to florists. We also grew a lot of our own vegetables. I learnt how to bottle, pickle, and freeze bucketloads of vegies. We also had a lot of fruit trees so making jam, marmalades and sauces was another time filler.

David left the public service two years after me and took up a postal round in Ferny Creek. I eventually shared this job.

We survived Ash Wednesday in January 1983. It was a very frightening time. I remember doing the postal round that day and you could just feel the heat and sense that a bushfire was imminent.

In August '84 we had our son Simon. I gave up delivering letters and eventually started providing Family Day Care through the local council. Minding children in my own home meant I could earn extra money but be home with my children. I have continued this job till the present, but have made a decision to stop in February 2006. What's ahead for me?

In 1993 David and I separated but I have continued living in Emerald as it feels like home to me and I love living in the hills. Simon continued living with me while Emily went back and forth to her dad's. Emily eventually came back to live with me when she became pregnant. Megan, my granddaughter, was born in September 1996. They both lived with me for three years. I feel so lucky to have had those years with Megan to bond with. When Emily left she generally lived close by so I had Megan in care.

Current Situation

Having my eye injury in Grade 1 was the beginning of continued hospitalisation, doctors' appointments, and lots of ointments and drops. In 1998 the eye became infected and it was recommended that I have it out. It was a decision only I could make, but I agreed. I now have a prosthesis that looks like the real thing but unfortunately for me my body keeps trying to reject it. Again, it means more surgery and lots of ointments and drops.

This last year has been an emotional ride with Emily and Megan moving to Tatura. I miss them very much. Emily married Ross Downie and now they are expecting twins. Megan at the age of nine years writes me lovely letters.

My son Simon turned 21 this year; another milestone. He has a job in a small business making specialised lenses for cameras.

I also had a relationship breakdown this year, which was difficult and painful. I have realised that finding the right person at our age is difficult as we are very set in our ways. I haven't given up hope in finding the right person to spend my life with. In the meantime I will keep up with my interests in life, which are my children, bush walking, gardening, reading, doing puzzles, my pets, and enjoying my many friends socially.



Helen Hoskin
December 2005



Teresa Crook (left) and Helen Hoskin at school reunion, St Albans, 2006.

Menu

[People](#)

[Photos](#)

[History](#)

[Albas](#)

[Top of Page](#)

[Home Page](#)

2014 Update



Helen with friends celebrating her 60th birthday.



Helen Hoskin, 2012

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