

HENRY GORALSKI: MATHS TEACHER



Family Background

I am of mixed European background: my mother is Russian and my father is Polish. My father's family was from Warsaw and even though my grandfather worked as a mechanic, Dad told me that poverty was a constant issue in their lives. His father lived by a boom and bust mentality. When he got paid he would put on a feast on Sunday and invite all his friends to drink and dine, and then have nothing for the rest of the week.

Both my parents had experienced the war in Europe as young teenagers, because they were taken from their respective homes at the age of 14, separated from their families, and taken to Germany and forced to work in the labour camps. They were replacing the German workers that had been enlisted into the war effort. They said they had a hard time and were near starvation for a couple of years in a row as they survived by eating potato peels and finding different ways of boiling up wood trying to get a bit of flavour out of it. The significant thing I found as a kid hearing those stories was looking at my father's feet. He went from the age of 14 through puberty to the age of 18 wearing the same wooden clogs. They were issued with only one pair of wooden shoes, like clogs. Because it was winter you had to wear shoes, and what he was issued had to last him all his internment years. His growing toes became deformed and now are bent at right angles to his feet. He said it was agony to walk.

That gave me a lot of insight as a kid about their war experiences and the sacrifices they had to make. That explained why my dad started having a really good time when they came to Melbourne and he finally had a good job. I remember as a young kid seeing all the good times at home when the drink was flowing every weekend. He was actually trying to recapture the youth that he never had.

Living in Belgium

I was born in Belgium in 1948. At that stage mum and dad had been pushed around Europe trying to avoid going back to Communist controlled areas, so they never saw their families again. That was a conscious decision. They could have taken their chance with the Russians but they didn't want to. That's why they ended up as displaced persons in Belgium. The only job my dad could get was working in the underground coal mines, which was very dangerous work because mines could explode without any warning. But the pay was very good and he worked there for two years. By refugee standards I suppose they were reasonably well off - his pay was good and they could afford a lot of the creature comforts. Then the Belgians started putting on pressure for them to move on because they were experiencing their own population issues.

Migrating to Australia

My parents saw some advertising about "Come to America" or "Come to Australia". My dad tells me he wasn't sure what he signed but he paid the relevant number of British pounds and we ended up on a ship when I was one year old.

We landed in Sydney. Part of the assisted package deal was that you spent two years working for the Commonwealth, in the sense that they would allocate you specific work and you were supposed to stick with that. While my mother, sister and I were in a camp in Bonegilla, dad went up to Northern Queensland and started felling the rain forests to open up the land for more sugar

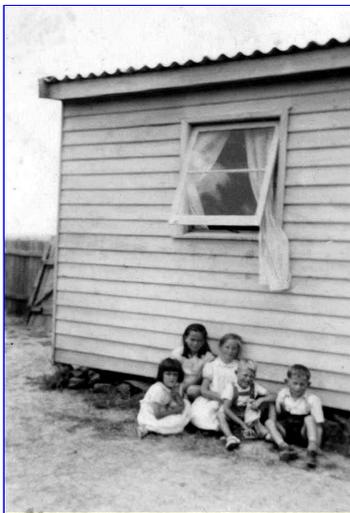
cane. He spent great amounts of time away from us. His half sister who lived in Melbourne corresponded with us and convinced us to come down to Victoria.



Barrack style accommodation at Bonegilla hostel and reception centre, 1950s.

Coming to St Albans

At the end of Dad's two-year work contract we went down to Melbourne and lived with his half-sister in Yarraville. Then Dad heard there was a chap from Sunshine selling land reasonably cheaply in St Albans, so he borrowed two pounds to put down something on deposit without even seeing the land. He then had to borrow more money for a bungalow, which was built with unlined cement sheet walls and an unlined roof of corrugated asbestos sheets. We moved into the unfinished bungalow and lived in that for more than three years before my parents were able to afford improvements.



I remember going to St Albans Primary School near the railway line; I would have started in 1955. Vova Karol and Peter Nowatschenko used to go there. I remember sitting on the floor of that old school and the teacher let us listen to some of the Olympic Games from Melbourne. That's a vivid memory. I only stayed there until grade two and then in grade three I moved over to the Catholic school and did my Communion.

The Sacred Heart School

In 1957 I moved to the Sacred Heart Catholic School for grade three and many of us kids who had been at the state school had their First Holy Communion that year. There was Joe Attard, Joe Ribarow, Vova Karol, John Brnjak, Frank van Kuelen of the ones I remember. It was a strange

place at first because I had never experienced nuns before and they could be pretty tough, though Sister Leonard was nice. Your educational progress was judged by your capacity to perform in public, because you had to come up to the front of the class to recite, and if you didn't recite well you had to put the hand out for the traditional smack across the open palm. We had to learn our work by rote and recite it very, very well. Now that I'm a teacher I look back at that as an 'interesting' way of educating kids.



Catholic boys at their First Holy Communion, with Fr Sheehan and Fr Reis, 1957. In the back row Henry Goralski is third from the left, Joe Ribarow is seventh, and Joe Attard is second from right. Peter Karol is the second row, third from Fr Reis's left side. Spot the rest!

However, young lads always invent their own diversions, and the performance standard set by the boys at the Catholic primary school was seeing whether we were old enough or big enough to urinate over the toilet wall. You were considered to be a hero if you could pee over the fence against which the urinal was built. That was our milestone at the Catholic school.

The other memory I have is getting the little silver stars for every day you went to church. I used to go six days a week so I accumulated quite a lot of stars. There was always a nun sitting in every second row or such and they would give you a little nod and duly acknowledge that morning at school that you had gone to church. The only day I didn't go to church was Saturday. That went on for months and months and at one stage Vova and I were competing for the most number of stars. It was a little bit incongruous that my family were extremely religious yet I was the only one going to church and I think the others lived their religion through me. I don't know why I became the designated church goer and star getter. I often raised that with my parents as I grew older and smarter, and the answers they gave me were never quite satisfactory.

Starting at St Albans High

In Grade 6, which was my last year at the Sacred Heart primary school, I joined numerous other students at the high school for those pre-assigning tests, because there was obviously some streaming in place for the intake of new students. We went in December and were given a barrage of tests dealing with arithmetic, comprehension, spelling, etc. On the basis of your results they placed you into class A, B, or C if you were taking French, and E, F, and G for German. There were two top streams, one in German and one in French. I think that separation of students by language stream was in place until the end of year 9. It was a pity this language separation cut across the friendships that we made at primary school, though of course we could see each other in the schoolyard during recess. Though in those first years of high school old school friends didn't quite go separate ways, we did pretty much interact mainly with the kids in the same class.

Apart from the learning, it was all fun and games out in the yard and sometimes there'd be a fight. I think there a few thugs at the school, that is, kids who enjoyed fighting. Somehow, miraculously, I seemed to survive all that. I was a very small lad until year 9 and when the growth hormones kicked in I shot up to join the taller ranks.



The school athletics team, 1962. Henry Goralski is in front row second from left.

Experience of Teachers

Numerous things happened at high school to remind you of the joys of education as well as the other side. After about a week of making numerous mistakes on the blackboard and getting flustered by the numerous times the pupils picked him up his arithmetic errors, our maths teacher defended himself by saying: "Well, it's not my fault. I was a bus conductor until I came out here." He came out on an assisted passage because they had a shortage of maths teachers and must have assumed that anyone who could give change must be qualified as a maths teacher.

In the junior grades we didn't necessarily have the best quality teaching that we had later on. In the formative years we had some quirky teachers but not necessarily competently trained teachers. I remember having music in years 7 and 8 where the teacher had an obvious love of music and would be lovingly polishing her 78 RPM records before and after she played them for us. She had a collection of albums that she would play for us as well teaching us theory. It was all very much classical music and she was a real aficionado.

Lindsay was good at mathematics and some teachers either recognised that brightness and tried to push it further or saw it as a challenge that he didn't want to be pushed by anyone. There was almost a love-hate relationship between Pavlov and Lindsay, because behind that grin Lindsay was determined not to be bested by any teacher. Many a time Pavlov would say something and Lindsay would fire back. The more Pavlov dug in the more Lindsay did too. One time Pavlov got so frustrated that he aimed a kick at Lindsay. Seeing that, I thought 'We've got no redress on this, but it's wrong.' I had a fair bit of time for Pavlov, but he was a teacher of the old mould. He would often come in with a moody attitude that had nothing to do us. He would always come in immaculately dressed while we were often dishevelled and sweating because we'd been playing sport at recess. He'd tell us to open the windows. There was a lot of that going on and we accepted that pretty much.

The Doc Walsh era is one that many people will remember. He did a lot for the boys at the school, particularly in the sport, but there was another side to him.

He was quite an avuncular man in his approach to boy's sports and his very personal approach might be frowned upon these days. At the time he was this amazing character who really put

sport on the map at school just through his enthusiasm and willingness to put himself out to organise competition after competition. He embedded in everyone a feeling of doing their best and in taking part in a variety of sports, most of them the traditional football and cricket. He introduced a points system for the sport houses and encouraged you to win the sport competitions and thus score points for your house. However, the boys could earn just as many points for their house (if not more) by having showers after the game as they would for winning a game of footy. That was a bit strange. Did the girls have a similar arrangement?

In year 10 we sat for the Intermediate Certificate exam, which was an eternal test though it was taken at the school. Some of the sports kids had finished as much as they could do half way through the allocated time and started talking sport to Doc, who was supervising at the front of the class. These were supposedly important exams and our supervisor and these sport students were talking out loud while the rest of us were trying to concentrate on our exam. I was extremely frustrated wondering what he was doing because I certainly couldn't concentrate. It was then I realised that sometimes Doc overdid his love for boys' sport, and that's probably why quite a few of the girls in his classes felt excluded.

Questionable Experiences

We did woodwork in year 7 and metalwork in year 8. Metalwork was a joy but for woodwork we had a real gruff fellow who didn't seem to like us. Our big introduction to woodwork was making a 15-inch ruler. I'd never used any woodwork tools before as my dad never had a workshop or tools apart from a hammer and a screwdriver. (I remember cutting the grass around the house with a large pair of scissors.) When it was my turn to use the vice and the plane I really enjoyed the nice slithery sound of wood shavings peeling away. I was so intent on watching the pencil mark on one side I hadn't noticed that the other end had slipped in the vice so that my piece of timber ended up much narrower at one end. I knocked on Chilton's office door and when he finally came out I showed him my work and said I didn't know what to do with it. He said "I know what I can do with it." He took my ruler and whacked me on the head with it, drawing some blood, and threw the piece of wood in the bin. That was his solution.

Occasionally, the actions of some teachers were quite bizarre. One of the students was an epileptic, and you would sometimes see him on the ground going through a grand mal. One day the seizures struck him at a particularly busy time in the corridor near the main office. Several kids were looking on not knowing what to do, because he was fitting quite convulsively, when one of the tougher teachers came and gave the lad a really big kick up the bum. We were all horrified but his justification was that it would snap him out of it. This is supposed to be an intelligent person with some sort of training.



Henry Goralski, Stan Coster, John Knott on a visit to Essendon Airport, 1962.

Commonwealth Scholarships

In Year 10 you could sit for the Commonwealth Scholarship exam that several of us were interested in doing. Our form teacher at that time was a fairly young and arrogant guy who didn't relate to us at all as a year level; he was just an administrator. I think we bored him. He made some brief passing comments about having to register if you intended to sit the exam. Quite a number of us decided take the exam and he objected to that, because there were about 30 kids wanting to register. He said that was ridiculous because on average only 6 scholarships were obtained per school and, taking into account the good schools in the state, we would be lucky to get one or two and so we were wasting our time. That's what he said. His attitude was pretty clear that we were wasting his time because he had to do the paperwork.

In fact quite a few of us did get the scholarship, I think it may have been 19, which was quite an incredible number because it was at least triple the state average. I think a lot of kids who got it were at first discouraged from even trying by this idiot who didn't want to do the paper work.

I remember those exams because they were quite challenging and tiring to do but they were also stimulating. Up until then we weren't really challenged academically.

I was pleased to get that scholarship because we had no money at home and the scholarship was the one thing that enabled me to buy my books and the family used the rest to pay bills.

Inspirational Teachers

I found there was something about the high school and the close relationship we had amongst ourselves and some of the teachers that helped us well beyond those school years. When we look back there were teachers who probably mentored us very well. There are several who were just wonderful people that did a terrific job with us, took the time, were gentle but at the same were very directional, gave good, solid advice, and were good role models. I liked Alcorn.

We had some very good maths teachers in our senior years, Barry Rayner being one of those, of course. I had a lot of time for Mr Hocking and Mr Scarff also had a bit of an effect on me. So did Mr Hart but for other reasons; he illustrated how important it is for people who take on a particular role not to let people down. Mr Maddox was a great mentor. He was a quietly spoken but very thoughtful person. I'd have conversations with him and the more you got to know him the more you appreciated he was a really genuine guy.

Mr Matthews in the short term had a great effect on me. Up until then I took language and the classics for granted but he gave me a bit a love for that. I developed a bit of a thirst for reading and finding out more about the cultural side of life. My attitude changed because people like Matthews, who was an English master, stimulated your imagination. I remember doing Julius Caesar with him. When we started reading the book it made no sense to anyone, because that style of language was unknown to anyone who wasn't familiar with Shakespeare. After a month or so Matthews took over the English class and he made that book come alive for us all. He would stop at the end of each page and explain what the language meant and we speculated what was going through the minds of the characters. In this way we discovered how cleverly it was written. By the time we finished the book I developed a bit of a love for Shakespeare. Matthews excited my imagination by acting as a translator for old English and made it understandable and enjoyable.

On the female side, Miss Butler had a soft spot for us. We also had a soft spot for her, and even though we gave her a heart attack many a time we didn't mean anything by it. We liked her a lot and would have defended her to the end if the occasion ever arose. She was also one of the ones who inspired us.

They are the teachers I'll never forget.

Year 11 Antics

Year 11 was a landmark because people who had been separated through the classes finally came together again and some important friendships then meshed, particularly amongst the boys. We started enjoying each other's company and often mixed socially out of school. We formed a peer group that shared a lot of joy in what to someone else would be thought of as absolutely stupid behaviour. We all looked forward to going to school because it wasn't a chore or a burden anymore, it was a lot of fun. We bounced ideas off each other and we all seemed to get the joke at the same time.



Graham, Peter N, Stefan, Joe R, Helen, Joe A, Lynnette, Nick, Peter B, Michael, Joachim, Vova, Lindsay, Henry, Geoff, David.

We probably weren't the brightest blokes in some ways and did some stupid things at times, as illustrated in the meticulous way we planned to raid the school at night to see if we could get a copy of a trial exam paper. We managed to find something that looked like an essay topic, so some stayed up most of the night trying to prepare for that topic and went in the next day absolutely exhausted. Consequently some of the marks were worse than obtained by other kids who went in unprepared but refreshed.

By then we would be playing fairly aggressive ball sports in the schoolyard. We'd play a game called brandy which started off with one person with a tennis ball chasing 20 kids around the yard and as you hit someone with the ball they would join you chasing the others. We played that lunchtime after lunchtime. Peter Barbopoulos must have had good peripheral vision because he had the knack of ducking down just as you threw the ball. Some of us twigged to this and I was waiting for that manoeuvre and delayed my throw. By then he was coming up again and the ball hit him between the eyes. I was laughing so much I couldn't run very fast but if he'd caught me he would have torn me from limb to limb. Fear kept me out of his reach long enough for his anger to dissipate.

The experimentation with chloroform and other gasses was a phase that didn't last too long, thank goodness. At that stage we had a chemistry teacher who very often was not there, so we were often left to our own devices. One time we were preparing nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide unsupervised in the prep room of the chemistry lab. They are gasses that should only be prepared in fume cupboards and there we were doing it in a small room with the door closed. I went home with a severe headache and was coughing for three or four days later. How we didn't gas ourselves or suffer brain damage is just beyond me. We'd all heard that chloroform was used as an anaesthetic in the old days so we tried some on a handkerchief and found it would numb your senses and put you to sleep if you had enough of it. It was a stupid thing to do and, in retrospect, further illustrates that even supposedly responsible students will be tempted to experiment in more ways than one when they are not supervised.

We also delighted in preparing hydrogen sulphide, which is rotten egg gas. We had the run of the lab and we'd make the gas and put the beaker in a coat cupboard at one end of the corridor and watch as they evacuated that wing because of the wretched smell.

But most of our antics were much more innocent. 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." We actually put on a performance on some evening occasion at the school and all I remember is shoes being thrown at us, which I think was an objective assessment of our musical ability.

Apart from Vova the only other person in our midst who had a bit of money was Peter Barbopoulos. His parents had a milk bar and he worked hard but at least he had money in his wallet. He actually had a wallet in year 11, which I think was a status symbol in itself. It was nothing for Peter to saunter over to the canteen and buy himself a drink every lunch time. Being part of the gang, as we used to call ourselves, he'd feel obliged to share it and often after everyone else had taken a sip he would end up with nothing. He steadily worked through all the flavours in the canteen until he finally found one that nobody else liked - it was Sarsaparilla. He hated it too but at least he could have that without everyone wanting a sip. That was the sacrifice he had to make to enjoy a drink in year 11.

Sometimes there was a dance in the St Albans Public Hall or at the Youth Club run by Lorna Cameron. It was at Lorna's dance classes that I learnt to socialise with girls because there was very little close socialisation between boys and girls at school. There were always the few bold boys with girlfriends, but for the rest of us there wasn't much mixing. In fact the school yard was segregated into girls' and boys' zones during our stay at school. So the Youth Club was an opportunity to learn the Barn Dance, the Pride of Erin, and the Evening Three Step, where you actually danced with and learnt to become comfortable in the presence of females. Lorna worked pretty tirelessly for the youth of St Albans in general and did a marvellous job for the kids in our school of our era.

We had to study a bit more in year 11 and someone suggested we meet at 11 o'clock just to show we were still up and studying. We'd meet and then go home and study some more. One night Vova and I were talking at his place - there must have been several of us there because we were playing cards - wondering how long we could stay awake. Vova and I were very competitive and had a bet between us. I think David and a few others were also involved. The idea was to see if we could stay up all night studying, not that you were studying much. The way we would confirm that we were still awake was to meet at the Coles corner at 2 o'clock and then go back home and finish studying, until eventually you fell asleep or decided you were sick of it and dropped out of the bet. I can remember getting from Monday to Friday without sleeping. I'd be listening to Stan Rolf on the radio struggling to stay awake and trying to do some work but probably nodding off occasionally. By Friday my ears were red and I couldn't concentrate on anything as I was just about asleep on my feet. In one of the classes that Friday afternoon I put my head on the desk for a second and by the time I woke up everyone had gone home while I was still snoring at the desk. I never did that again. That was to win a bet with Vova, and he never paid up. He never believed I had stayed awake that long and there was no way I could convince him.

Year 12 Activities

In year 12 a few students got involved in inter-school debating. The St Albans team survived the early rounds and got through to the grand final, if I recall correctly. The team was Cathy Hatjiandreou, Marin Gunew and Joe Ribarow. A few of us used to go along to the debates even when they held at other schools to support our side. The debates were interesting. In one session Joe was talking about the effectiveness of newspapers in disseminating news and opened up the Herald, supposedly at random, to show how much news it actually contained. The spot he'd

chosen had a full-page Myer's advertisement with a very small news story on the back. That got a good laugh from the audience and I thought it was a winning argument for his team.

We played a lot of five hundred, which I think took the edge off our studies. All lunchtimes and any spare lessons we were in there playing cards. The first four played and the others watched. We had access to the science wing in year 12 so we had an exclusive little area that we totally enjoyed.

We were a close knit peer group but all the students in that Matric year got on very well together. There were people who weren't in my gang but were terrific people. The Hatjiandreas, for instance, were just lovely people. Cathy was like a mother to us in giving us good advice. This was about the time I had my first girlfriend and I felt so awkward I was almost scared of her. Cathy would always give me words of encouragement. It's a shame I didn't listen to more of her advice. She was a lovely person.

In many ways it's a shame they split us up again, this time into science and humanities streams. If you did maths-sciences you went into a particular English class, so in year 12 there were two English classes: the maths stream and the humanities stream. Once in a while we'd get together and have discussions initiated by teachers like Mrs Gliddon, who encouraged us to debate the maths-humanities divide. Maybe it was intended to stimulate thought but some of it fostered a somewhat artificially competitive debate that emphasised the divisions rather than the common interests. Despite the friendliness we didn't go through year 12 as a united group. We were the science boys - almost like the engineering jocks at university - this strange group, and probably by our behaviour we were a bit strange. We were certainly a very close and loyal bunch of guys and probably to outsiders we might have been seen to be cliquy. We had a real identity and I treasure that. I treasure those friendships.

Facing Expulsion

One day in year 12 we were heading off in a bus for an athletics meet with another school. Being year 12 kids we were first on the bus and headed down the back in our boisterous way. Chilton was at the front of the bus and called out "Hoy, you lot! I want you up the front, so get up the front right now!" He was being quite rude, whereas at that year level most teachers were quite polite to prefects. We walked back to the front and I'm bristling because I can hear this voice like I was in year 7 when I was being hit on the head with the piece of wood. I said "We can sit up the back. We're not hurting anyone are we?" He was standing right in front of me and gave me two sharp pokes in the chest with his index finger: "Don't you talk to me like that sonny!" I'm never an aggressive fellow but at that point I got that angry that I put my hand in his chest and I pushed him. He stumbled back and grabbed the handrail because he was near the steps. Everyone on the bus had gone quiet. He looked around the bus and said "You're all witnesses, you all saw what he did. He had a go at me."

I was removed from the bus, but they were short on the relay team so Rayner took me in his car to the meet and we had a bit of a chat along the way. The next day prior to the Year 12 assembly the principal had me in his office and said "You are going to apologise to Mr Chilton at the assembly or you are going to be expelled." There was no two ways about it and they weren't interested in my part of the story. For the first time in my life my pride nearly got the better of me, because I nearly said I'll take the expulsion. Mr Alcorn interceded and asked if he could talk with me. He pretty much said to me, "You've just got to do it. There are some things you don't do, and one of those is you don't lay a hand on a teacher. He will expel you, not because he wants to, but because he's got to make an example." He talked me round, so I had to go into a very hushed room of year 12 students and apologise. If there is anything I regret in my whole school career it is that, because I really felt on principle that I shouldn't apologise, and I should have made that issue go a little bit further. That was probably the only time I was at risk of nearly severing my school career. It was a horrible day for me.

My parents didn't know about this. In those days we took things quietly and didn't report anything at home. If you got into trouble you copped the consequences and didn't complain to your parents. I had been in no trouble at the school in six years but I was surprised at times by the lack of respect and the lack of dignity that some teachers showed towards students. I've always had the belief that you have to be egalitarian, which came from what we experienced as being migrants.

Becoming Mobile

Towards the end of year 12 Vova got his driver licence so we started going on trips to places like Bendigo or Sale. I also got a car towards the end of the year, but mine was an ancient Hillman while Vova's was a relatively new Ford Falcon. Mine was so old it consumed almost as much oil as it did petrol, and Vova always reckoned he could run faster than the car. In fact one day he hopped out of the car and raced me to the corner of the street to prove his point. He won.

After the last exam we decided to go to Bendigo to celebrate so we set off with high spirits and a couple of flagons of Sauternes. That was in Vova's car, not mine. It was a filthy night and half way there we had to stop to camp somewhere till the morning. It was all empty paddocks until we finally saw an old shed with nothing else around so we decided to stop there. We'd been sitting there a couple of hours sipping Sauternes and telling our life stories when suddenly coming down the driveway were police cars with spotlights and guys with guns telling us not to move or they'd shoot. The farmer who'd called the police listened to our story and let us stay. So that was a good ending.



L Chatterton, H Goralski, J Attard, V Karol, P Barbopoulos, D Dusting, G Landers, 1966.

Fruit Picking in Shepparton

At the end of year 12 a few of us decided that we could get a head start on tertiary education by earning the big money by going fruit picking at Shepparton. We had corresponded with an orchardist in Maroopna, and he was quite happy for us to come up and pick fruit for him. Six of us left on the train for Shepparton: myself, Lindsay Chatterton, Joe Attard, Joe Ribarow, Vlad Turok and one other person, possibly Marin Gunew, though I think he joined us later. We had these rough-as-guts sleeping bags and a change of clothes but Vlad arrived with his goose feather doona, his chest expanders, and a trumpet. Vlad was always a very cool guy, I think he was the coolest guy at school, and he obviously had a unique perception of what roughing it out in the country really meant. We slept under a bridge that night and that was enough for half the team - they left for home the next day. We'd arrived a few days early so the remaining three of us decided to look around the town for a couple of days and sleep under the bridge. We reported to the police station to say who and where we were but that afternoon a patrol car came to check us

out anyway. They let us stay there but warned us that the area was prone to flooding and we should find somewhere safer. We looked at this little stream at the bottom of the valley and thought he was exaggerating just to move us on. When we returned to the spot after the rains came a couple of weeks later that valley was completely flooded up to within two feet of the bottom of the bridge, which proves you should never ignore local advice.

Anyway, we were heading for Max Hall's orchard and thinking that was just a stone's throw away we walked from Shepparton to Maroopna, which I think was about 12 kilometres. When we asked for directions to the orchard we were told "just up this road". Well, that was another 5 kilometres. Mr Hall put us up in a little sleepout out the back and next day we started some itinerant gardening because the apricots were not quite ripe enough for picking. When the picking season started we planned to start off picking about 30 cases each on the first day. After a day's hard picking starting about 6 or 7 in the morning I think we picked about 5 cases between us. Thank goodness Mr Hall took pity on us and gave us some gardening work, because we would have starved otherwise. We talked with some of the fruit pickers who told us their life stories and we could see it was a hard life, but more importantly we learnt about resilience too. The three of us, later four when Marin joined us, also proved our determination not to be beaten. We weren't going to make much money but we weren't going to go home defeated either. We made a point of sticking it out for about four weeks until all the apricots on that farm had been picked. It was a good learning experience and we made just enough money to prove we were successful in finding work.

Melbourne University

I started at Melbourne University in 1967, where I was doing the Bachelor of Science course majoring in chemistry. That whole experience of university studies was wonderful. I loved chemistry a lot and was nearly going to stay on and enroll in the honours year, because I had a real love for organic chemistry.

At that stage during the holidays I was working at Hoechst, a chemical company at Altona. I was working there as a technical assistant trying to earn some money for my final year at university when they made me an offer to go to Germany for 12 months. I had to think long and hard about that offer, and though I declined it I often think back what life would have been like if I had gone overseas, finished my degree there, and then taken on the chemical engineering side and worked in polymer chemistry. That wasn't to be.

There was something sad about leaving uni because in many respects it was a sheltered workshop or a protected environment, where you could immerse yourself in intellectual exercises and the real world did not intrude too much at all. This was a sharp contrast to the early years of parenthood when you're the bread winner trying to balance work and family life as well the mortgage payments.

Confronting Mortality

By the time I started at university Vova already had his restricted flying licence and could take passengers, so he invited several of his friends to join him on a hunting trip. Vova, Joe Attard, Peter Barbopoulos and I hired a plane for the day from Moorabbin and Vova flew us up to Deniliquin to go pig hunting. We landed pretty much in the middle of nowhere in a sort of desert and the only sign of life you could see were some emus in the distance. Not a pig in sight. We ended up having practice shots at some old tree stumps, and that was it.



Joe Attard, Henry Goralski, and Peter Barbopoulos near Hay, NSW.

When we headed back it was a clear and hot afternoon with northerly winds but then a cool change came through Victoria so we landed at Mangalore and sat in the plane until the hail storms passed. We were in the air again by 3 in the afternoon heading for home, but as we got over the Divide we were suddenly confronted by this enormous wall of white in front us. The cool change had come and all the mist and fog had started to come in, which I'd never experienced before. Within 30 seconds the mist was all round us and it was so thick we couldn't see the plane's wing tips, and it was only a small Cessna. It was like flying in milk. Vova was on a restricted licence, which meant he was able to fly by sight but hadn't yet trained to fly only by instruments, so he was trying to get us back to Moorabbin without being able to see anything.

We tried to fly above the fog but the plane couldn't get up that high. It felt as if we were flying like that for about an hour without being able to see anything and knowing that some of the peaks in the Great Dividing Range were at the same height as we were flying. It's the closest I've come to actually making peace with my maker. I thought 'There is no way out of this, I think I'm going to die.' I had made my peace and was regretting I hadn't seen my family that day, because I'd left before anyone else was up, and was thinking it was sad that I couldn't say goodbye. Suddenly through all this dense mist we could see a ray of light emerge and this tiny postage stamp of visibility opened up before us. Vova took us down through that opening and we were in a valley.

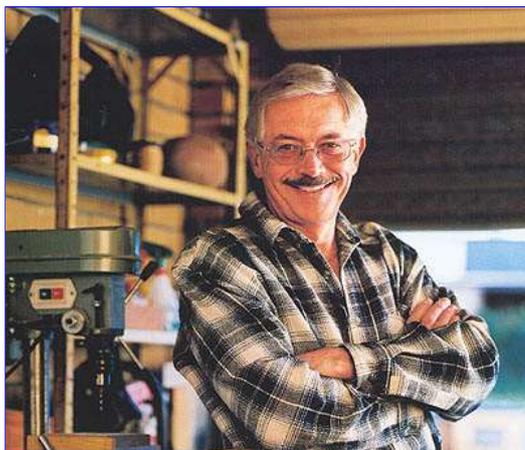
We circled and circled and circled that valley and Vova said we would have to land because the valley was surrounded by hills and there was fog above so there was no way out. We saw two paddocks which we flew past a few times checking them out for landing possibilities. We landed diagonally in the left hand paddock but didn't have quite the distance and hit a fence post. The plane was damaged a bit but none of us were injured because Vova had controlled the plane well and it was a low speed collision at the end. It was just starting to get dark, so we were lucky to have got down.

A farmer arrived and said we were lucky to have landed in that paddock because the other one was full of overgrown drain ditches that wouldn't have been visible from the air. We weren't meant to die. We had ended up over Gippsland heading towards Bairnsdale. Peter Barbopoulos had a wallet of money so he paid for the cab back to Moorabbin and we were all very quiet driving back home. That night I didn't go to bed but stayed up writing in my diary about my mortality and that for the first time ever I had accepted death as a personal possibility. We didn't mention anything about this to our parents either. I think it was something we wanted to talk about amongst ourselves later, but we didn't. Years later my sister saw some photos I had taken of the damaged plane and she put two and two together, because she remembered me coming home that night in an unusual state.

Teaching Career

After finishing at Melbourne University I ended up training for a career in teaching and have worked for thirty odd years in that field. The years seem to have passed by so quickly, probably because they have been very satisfying years.

I went into teaching with a vocational view, and I'd like to think that over the years that I've stuck to that ideal. I've worked in the secondary school system all my career, mainly taking senior maths. I've always worked in the western region and preferred working in areas where the emphasis was not just on straightforward teaching but also involved with motivating kids who weren't easily motivated. I've enjoyed that challenge. I worked with schools in Sunshine, Footscray, Werribee, Melton, and Bacchus Marsh. Those were areas where I thought I could do more than just teaching and do some role modelling for kids.



After taking a retirement package at 54-11 not that long ago I was running my own carpet cleaning business for nearly three years. Comparing that experience with teaching is really talking chalk and cheese and I could write a book about that, but it really wasn't what I was looking for as a new interest. At that stage my son was in year 7 and one day at a parent interview I mentioned that I also had worked in the education system. The principal had been looking for teachers and offered me the role of Maths Coordinator. So, despite a brief sojourn in private business, I'm back in teaching.

Family

My first marriage ended up in divorce and it was rather tough working full time and raising two daughters on my own. My neighbours at the time were very helpful because they provided the child care until I got home. It was a challenge to come home and do the housework and then learning to do all the cooking.

My older sister, Christine, left high school as soon as she could, which was after year 10, and worked as a secretary for John Stevens. His family was one of the early settlers in the area and over the years his father had bought lots of land around St Albans. John later became a real estate agent and was selling house and land packages. The Stevens brothers also ran the successful timber and hardware store for many years. John was a highly principled entrepreneur who helped a lot of migrants and even helping out of his own pocket at times. When he sold off the last of his farmland he selected not the highest bidder but sold it to someone he knew had an affinity for the land. John passed away a couple of years ago. Christine is now with Medibank Private in the city.

My other sister Helen is with the student administration office at VUT. My brother Stan started working at the Darling Flour Mills in Albion and ended up running a mill in Perth. He died unexpectedly from a cerebral haemorrhage at the age of 32. Richard, the youngest brother, is running his own business with a delivery truck.

My parents are now in their 80s and still living in St Albans in a unit on the same block of land they bought with that borrowed £2 deposit more than fifty years ago.



Reunion 2003: Lindsay Chatterton, Nick Szwed, Henry Goralski, Peter Nowatschenko.

On Reflection

Many migrants who came here were starved of opportunity back in their own countries and saw education as an opportunity for their kids to succeed in life and insisted the kids take that opportunity and do the best they can. Because of my parents' experience of hardship, they definitely saw education as the ticket for their children to get out of poverty. That is why they encouraged me to stay on at school and to go on to further education.

When we were kids the Aussies, particularly Aussie adults, viewed us in certain ways as wogs. They viewed us with suspicion. Because we were new to the country and often didn't have a lot of things we were viewed as the underclass and the underprivileged. Our parents had to start from scratch and often had to make large personal loan repayments. We didn't live flash. For years and years we lived in a three-room bungalow that wasn't even lined. We were a bit of an underclass at that time and that was part of my upbringing. I think some teachers had that attitude about us. Very few teachers went to the bother of trying to pronounce our surnames correctly. Some would butcher our names and they didn't care. In the end I got tired of trying to correct the pronunciation of my name.

But by the time I was in Year 12 I'd pretty much formed the opinion that I was as good as anyone else. The fact that we'd got all those scholarships in year 10 proved to me that we were as good as anyone, and just because we lived in St Albans or had a particular type of surname ...

My overall impression is that there were many other students in situations similar to mine that went through St Albans High and some of the talent and the calibre of the students that graduated from there is as good as from anywhere else. We have had a number of very high achievers though their early origins may not be obvious. The diversity of nationalities at the school was just wonderful and to have all those people melded together, the different cultures we all brought with us, settling into a functioning community was a very successful experience.

To me, the important things that happened to me in my formative years happened at school, and what I did later in life was because of what had formed me at St Albans High School.

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Henry Goralski, 2005.

Bonegilla photograph courtesy of Kon Haumann, other photos from Henry Goralski.