

MARIN GUNEW: CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR, ENLIGHTENED MISFIT

Arrival



We came to St Albans in 1951 from Germany. My parents were Dimiter and Ursula Gunew and my sister was Sneja. It so happened that one of my mother's great uncles - my mother came from a very old, titled family in Germany called von Stein - was living in St Albans. The great uncle was Wilhelm von Stein, who called himself Willy Stein over here. He was actually one of the pioneering farmers in the sugar industry up in Bundaberg, but that didn't work out for him. His daughter lived in St Albans, and her name is Mary Smith. It was through these relatives that we came to Melbourne. The connection was part of the good fortune of coming from a well-connected, long-established, European family that had tentacles all over the place, so to speak.

My father got a position with ICI as a research chemist even before he left Germany, because that's what he was, a research chemist.

We originally stayed with Willy Stein's son, who lived in North Balwyn. Through Mary's husband, Eric Smith, we bought a block of land in St Albans on the corner of Oberon and Station avenues. My father sold some chemical glassware he had brought out from Germany to his employer (ICI) and with that money built the first two-and-a-half rooms of our house.

I turned two on the journey to Australia, so I was about two-and-a-half when we came to St Albans and I have very early memories. A lot of things that are now considered old history were considered brand new.

Early Memories

In those days there was lots of space; you could see from our house all the way to the railway track. You could see all the old steam-driven wheat trains coming down the track.

One of my earliest memories is the milkie coming round; this was the days before the use of milk bottles. He used to come with a horse and dray and a one-pint ladle, and you'd go out with your container and he'd scoop out the number of pints that you wanted.

My images of the early days was the wide open spaces, the opportunity, the freedom, the ability to be a kid. It didn't provide anything that wasn't there but it tempered the whole lot into a workable alloy. There was a sense of community - not the artificial, highly organised community that is engineered these days, but the genuine, spontaneous interaction of people. I remember one windy day my mother was struggling to take down the washing from the line when the two Self brothers happened to be passing by doing their deliveries. They just hopped out of the truck and helped her bring the washing in.

These were also the days when things weren't available. European-style delicatessens were not available, so getting capsicums, eggplant, and even olive oil was a real fight. Consequently, you'd have some enterprising chaps coming round selling this type of goods from the back of their car. These hawkers, as they were known, were not popular with the Traders Association, because they claimed it took business away from local suppliers. There may have been a bylaw prohibiting hawkers, but if that was the only way to get the food you were accustomed to, then people thought so be it.

I always consider myself to be incredibly fortunate that I was able to see the dying days of a different era before we came into the opulence of the '50s and then the cyber space of the '05s.

My Father

My father, Dimiter Stefanov Gunew, was fortunate, in so far as he had a fairly high degree from the technical university in Munich. When he applied for his qualifications to be recognised at the university here, they would not acknowledge his degree at all. When asked at the interview, he said his qualifications were at least equivalent to a Master of Science. They laughed at him and said he'd be lucky if they recognised him as a Bachelor. But he applied to the Royal Australian Chemical Institute, which was the governing body of work in chemistry at the time. Some weeks later a letter arrived at our place recognising him as a Master of Science. That was the calibre of his work.

He became a research associate with ICI and he spent the rest of his working life there working on analytical chemistry, pushing the limits of many of their so-called forensic and bio-genetic advances that have been made over the years due to techniques that were pioneered by my father and other people.

He worked in a field called chromatography, which is a very, very high quality method of analysis used in many different fields. ICI still holds some patents that he developed.

My father died in 1980 at the age of 60. He was looking forward to his imminent retirement, and had a little property in Healesville all ready, when he passed away.

My Mother

My mother, Ula Zimmerman, was born in Berlin but ended up in Munich after the war. She was already a trained medical lab technician and radiographer when we came to Australia. She worked most of her life in the paramedic field of x-rays with the TB bureau, which no longer exists, then with private practices, then in 1958 she changed over to the new field of electroencephalography, which is monitoring the electrical impulses between various areas of the brain and from the wave shapes generated determining the presence of epilepsy, the focus of abscesses, tumours, etc.

She ended up as head of the unit at the Childrens Hospital prior to retiring.

Both my parents were fortunate in that they worked in the fields for which they had trained overseas. A good friend of the family, Nick Bojadjeff, who called himself Nick Boyd in later years because Bojadjeff was a little bit too much for the Anglo tongue, was a qualified mechanical engineer. He ended up making wrought iron gates for all and sundry because his qualifications were not recognised. Things like that were not uncommon.

Primary School

I started school in 1955 at the old school near the railway line. Then, at the start of 1956, I was one of the first students to go to the St Albans East Primary. I was already showing signs of being somewhat of a difficult ... troublesome ... troublemaker ... whatever have you. I was having trouble at school, which boiled down to three things.

Firstly, I was dyslexic. In the 'fifties people didn't know what dyslexia was, so I was continuously in trouble because my work looked like a dog's breakfast. I had no idea of spelling.

At the same time I was gifted with an inquiring and fairly agile mind. I had this mania for "looking with my fingers" as my parents used to say, which inevitably meant I broke a lot of things before I figured out how to put them back together again.

Furthermore, primary school wasn't a fun time for me, because it was not where my head was at. My head was out in the paddocks, looking at bits of machinery, figuring out how things worked, going exploring in the bluestone ruins along the Maribyrnong creek.

High School

After primary school I was sent to a little school called Sunshine Boys College. The head was a guy called R.T. Connelly. He was interested in science and languages, and ended up lecturing in the University of Palermo in Italy and became a major international figure as a Latin scholar.

Connelly recognised my curious nature, my mania for understanding how things worked, and he gave me free reign of the library.

I came to St Albans High School in 1964 - fourth form. I found the independence that I had developed at the boys college held me in good stead, in so far as I could read who was the big banana that had to be listened to, and who was just throwing their weight around.



Marin Gunew, Stefan Czyn, Anton van Ree, Philip Spivey

School was always something that had to be serviced but got in the way of living. I pretty much did my own thing, which in those days was electronics, radios, short wave. I had had an interest in knowing what other people were doing in other parts of the world since I was knee high to a grass hopper. I got my first crystal set when I was in third grade. The first thing I did - much to my parents' frustration - was to rip it apart and put it back together again, just so that I could see how it worked.

Later I played terrible practical jokes. I would wire a speaker into our letterbox, which was out on the front fence near the corner bus stop. So, on a cold and dark winter's morning the Voice of America would suddenly start broadcasting from this letterbox and the people waiting for the bus would all be looking around wondering what was happening. That was my perverse sense of humour. These experiments resulted in me becoming proficient in wiring microphones and speakers.

I also realised in my early days of high school that I had a fairly innate sense for mathematics, so it was easy for me to work things out. I used to just remember the basics and worked things out as I needed to, which frustrated people no end. I never studied.

I became involved with the debating team during fifth form, which was also a good learning experience. As I recall there were Cathy Hatjiandreou and Joe Ribarow as well as myself, encouraged by Miss Butler, Mrs Gliddon, and another teacher whose name I've forgotten. Over the next couple of years there were some fairly intense theological debates with Val Noone. He started off by giving the standard religious instruction responses, but we were more interested in some of the esoteric theological arguments and ended up engaging with him at that level. The constant debates created some fairly self-sufficient psyches amongst the group.

I especially liked the precursor friendship interactions with teachers; the acknowledgement of my point of view was empowering. This all came to an end in my first attempt at Matriculation. I was doing so many things that I ended up failing the year, passing only in maths and physics.

Tilting at Windmills

My time at school was not one of subservience. I was managing the requirements of the institution so as to meet my own needs. I have clear memories of tilting at windmills at the high school. Authority was something to be dealt with and endured; you had to get around it as best you could. There was nothing malicious about such challenges, as we had respect for fellow human beings because of our understanding what hardships families had been through. One example of our this was with the dress code. In the reign of Torpey, kids were getting detention for not wearing caps. After each assembly Torpey would finish off with the instruction "Boys, put your caps on." One morning our form spontaneously decided not to do it. It was not a planned action, but a spontaneous one. He repeated the instruction and we still didn't comply, so he closed the meeting anyway.

Within a week the policy of boys having to wear caps was abandoned, and I'm sure some of the senior teachers were backing our stance behind the scenes. That foray into civic disobedience was the beginning of a long road of making our own decisions and living with the consequences.

Matriculation

I repeated my Matriculation, but I wasted the opportunity. In retrospect, I'd like to go back and do a lot more work for a far better result and go on to study lots of other things. But I learnt something about myself - I'm a lousy student. I excel in some areas of study, but at my own time table. I'm lousy at getting assignments in on the day required, etc, etc.

My parents appreciated the thinking brain and encouraged me to develop insight into problems. However, my questioning wasn't always well received at school. One year my chemistry teacher kicked me out of class six weeks before the exams. When my parents spoke to the school the justification for this action was that I kept asking questions of why and how in response to the teacher's presentation. Apparently these were questions you were not allowed to use too often at school. However, it's because of St Albans that I never stopped thinking.

The 'fifties and 'sixties in St Albans, and especially St Albans High School, bred a high level of personal self reliance and personal responsibility - if you want it done, do it! They were strengthening years, and I'm eternally grateful for the strength that St Albans gave me.

Conscientious Objection

I have a fairly clear sense of what's right and what's wrong and a strong sense of conscience. If I could at all avoid it, I wouldn't do something I didn't feel good about. I've been the kid who's been saying the emperor's got no clothes for as long as I can remember. Which has meant that I have fought against various ridiculous authorities, culminating probably in my largest challenge, which was when I was called up for National Service and Vietnam. I declined the invitation.

They spent the next three years trying to lock me up. They didn't succeed. Being anti-military and anti-organised-religion, even I was surprised that I had an early member of the RSL (my English teacher and senior master of St Albans High, Mr Matthews) giving evidence on my behalf. I also had a Catholic priest, Val Noone, giving evidence on my behalf.

I'm glad to report that the court accepted my position of conscientious objection.

Val and I have subsequently caught up with each other. He ended up leaving the established church, though he's still a committed Christian. He became a lecturer at Western Institute and then moved to Melbourne University.

My anti-war stance wasn't just for my own benefit. During the Gulf War I was working in television in Sydney. I thought the whole Gulf War was a beat up. Sadam Hussein was the US's man and he'd asked permission of the US to invade Kuwait. The exact wording of the telegram from April Gillespie, the American Ambassador, was "with respect to your in-Arab border dispute we have no position on the matter." This is diplomatic doublespeak that means "go for it." It was a setup for the US to try and get back control of Iraq and a few things.

At this time there was a demonstration outside the US consulate in Sydney. As I walked up they were calling for speakers, so I took the microphone and challenged the media to report my talk - and all the filming lights got turned off.

I said: "The reason this war is taking place is that America is in a recession, the *raison d'être* for a 1.5 million army in Europe has just collapsed because detente has broken out and the Berlin Wall has broken down. If America brought those troops back and put them on the unemployment market it would be chaotic. So they needed somewhere else to put them and they needed to crank up the industry. This has nothing to do with Sadam Hussein." I then quoted the message from April Gillespie. "It's got to do with the American economy and American control of the Middle East." All the media disappeared and I left.



Working for IBM

After Matric I did electronic engineering at RMIT, and with this background in 1969 I talked my way into a job with IBM as a field engineer. I worked with IBM for a couple of years and realised that doffing my cap to the Board and the company image and not saying boo was not my cup of tea, even though I quite enjoyed the work. Think of 1969 as the height of cool culture; everything was happening. At IBM you have to wear a suit and tie to work every day. I was running about five suits and a variety of coloured shirts with matching ties; interesting and top quality apparel.

One day I got pulled into the office by one of the managers. All he said was: "I'm going to tell you a story, Marin. There was a guy on the Board of IBM. He wore a coloured shirt to a Board meeting one time. He's now earning \$8,000 a year less and isn't on the Board anymore."

I thought to myself: Is he kidding? Am I a 5-year-old? Shortly after that I left.

Teaching

After that I went to Melbourne Teachers College. Again, I got involved in all sorts of things. At this time I had a young son and a sick wife, so I was looking after my family, driving cabs full-time, and studying full-time at the same time. This is when I discovered my 24 hour nature. Things ceased to be happening on a particular day, it was always how many hours to the next commitment. That was rather interesting.

I also got involved in the political life at the Teachers College. This was back in the time when Whitlam came into power, the early 'seventies. I became a bit of a stirrer and ratbag around the college, a vocal member of the left.

I first taught at St Pauls College in Altona. Then I got a job working with hyperactive and emotionally disturbed youth at a unit in Kew called Kurrajong Secondary, and worked there a few years. I found it the most stressful and most rewarding work I have ever experienced.

Ten years after the unit had closed I was in Sydney, and one night I received a telephone call from three of the kids from the unit. They had traced me down just to say hi and thanks, and asked me to join them for a beer next time I was in Melbourne. You don't expect that after ten years. My rather unconventional manner had got through to them. Not all of the kids, but some of the ones the other teachers couldn't get through to I got through to, because I saw the problem somewhat differently. It makes you feel you've actually done something.

Video Production

After Kurrajong I went back to cab driving. One day I collected a passenger from Channel 10, and in the trip from Nunawading to Belgrave I talked my way into a job. Shortly afterwards I started as a trainee tape operator at Channel 10 (Channel 0, as it was then known). I worked for Channel 0/10 and for Channel 9 Sydney, became a supervising tape operator for Kerry Packer at his production house, Video Tape Corp, in Sydney, and moved to a couple of other production houses.

Then in 1986 I bought a shelf company called Becuvo Proprietary Limited and started my own production company. The company name didn't mean anything but we thought of it as the Bureau of Executive Video Operators. We were a bunch of loons but pioneered magazine publication in electronic format, and released the world's first motor cycle magazine video. Instead of reading Rev, Two Wheels, or AMCN, you sat down and watched a 90 minute program. That went right around the world, to the Cannes Video Festival and all sorts of places. We sold part of it to Channel 4 in England. This was in 1987.

It was going nicely and we'd just made our way onto the NSW government's list of preferred tenders list for video production. Then thanks to Mr Keating and the recession we had to have the company closed down. The majority of our money was coming from promotional videos, or corporates as they were called. With the recession no one was spending on video production, they were trying to find a rock to crawl under and hide themselves rather than promote themselves.

We went down for about \$120,000 but the partners paid off the debt.

Earlier, I had had a serious offer to have my own studio built if I was prepared to do porn videos. My response was thanks but no thanks.

Selling Bullion

I next became involved in a company that was dealing in bullion. My job was basically as an information analyst. We never actually sold any gold, but if any one of the deals had ever dropped you'd be talking to a billionaire right now. What the business research was excellent for was finding out who was doing what in the world. It was an incredible intelligence base. As a result, the organisation was infiltrated by both Yankee and Chinese security agents, who didn't half make their presence obvious. One of the characters, a Chinese guy, went back to China at the time of Tianan Square and then left China again - no one was getting out of there at the time unless they were working for the government.

San Sernin Sur Rance in France

Through this company I met people who were involved with the video display industry. That's when I got a job working with the French. It was about 1990. When I was a kid I played with radio valves, but after IBM I wasn't involved with electronics, I was word smithing. Then I got straight back into electronics and picked



up chip technology. It was quite challenging and I was quite happy with the challenge of coming to terms with chip level devices, doing maintenance in the field.

I was based in a little town about 100 kilometres east of Toulouse, a little village called San Sernin Sur Rance. The whole village of about 500 people would go out of their way to show this Australian how to have a good time. I wasn't complaining. I was living in a small hotel in the village, run by Pierre Carayon, and which had been in the family for about five generations. When I came back and retold the story to my sister-in-law, who has refined food tastes, she went into total apoplexy because apparently that hotel is written up in the Michelin Guide and is a place people drive half-way across France to eat at. And I was living there.

The Australian arm of the business went broke, so that was the end of that career.

Guam

I was contacted by a chap from Guam, who was heir to a couple of million US. Sonny had bought a whole lot of video walls and a video wall company in Inarajan and had been ripped off unmercifully by US technicians. He flew me out and I did a six-week stint, solved 90% of his problems without ripping him off, so I got a twelve-month contract. I was living in Guam being looked after by Sonny Adda. I was doing it tough: I had a Mazda MX5 as my company car, a two-bedroom apartment a couple miles from the beach, and US\$1,000 in the pocket every week.

They'd never come across anyone who'd actually done real work. The first time I put in a 24-hour stint they were beside themselves. They couldn't understand how anyone could put in a 24-hour shift. My view was the job had to be done - end of story. I'd come from working with television timetables where you're told that's your deadline, you've got to be on air then. You did it. There was a lot of rapport there, a lot of satisfaction. I had a good life. Then Guam was hit by an earthquake and the job vaporised.



Class reunion 2005: Michael Hatjiandreou, Miss Butler (Joan Rayner), Marin Gunew.

Australia

When I came back to Australia I walked into unemployment for the first time in my life. I found it very difficult to find work, so I started doing odds and ends, such as maintaining video walls on a contract basis. Sydney was very expensive so I came back to Victoria. Then my mother's eyesight went and I started looking after her. So, I've been a carer ever since.

Sometimes I wish I hadn't developed such a strong sense of conscience, because it has cost me dearly, financially speaking. I find I cannot bring myself to work for organisations whose raison d'être I don't like.

For example, I was offered the contract to do all the navy training films when I had my video production company in Sydney. This would have been the opportunity to sit back, relax, you've just won the jackpot sort

of thing. I had to say no. Other people had asked me to work on more dubious sorts of videos, to whom I also said no.

A few years ago I thought of going back to university to study law. I was accepted into the course but then knocked the offer back because I realised I was a lousy student the first time round, and what was going to be different this time?



Marin Gunew, 2005.



Tin Shed book launch 2004: Marin, Marilyn, Kathy, Stefan, Luba.



Reunion 2005: Jutta Heymig-Szwed, Detlef Beyer, Marin Gunew, Peter Nowatschenko.



Marin Gunew at Healesville, 2015.



Marin Gunew, Kathy Alexopoulos, Peter Karol, Jutta Szwed, school reunion, 2016.

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Luba Uwarowa, Nick Szwed, Joe Ribarow, Marin Gunew, school reunion 2016.

Photographs courtesy of Nick Szwed and Peter Nowatschenko.