

IRENE LENC nee JOZWIK: PUBLIC SERVANT

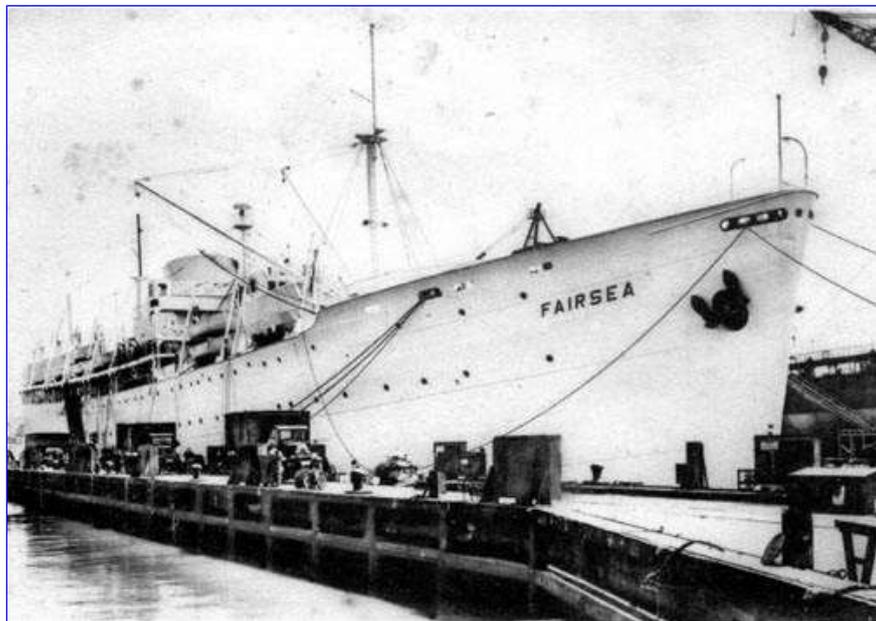
Introduction



My parents were Anna and Henry Jozwik, from Poland. I am the eldest child, with a younger sister named Janine and a younger brother called Joseph. My parents may have been of Polish background but I was born in Australia, in Wagga Wagga.

My father came to Australia on the Fairsea, which landed in Melbourne in June 1948. He was one of the people sponsored under the IRO group settlement scheme. He must have gone to Bonegilla at first, because I remember my mother talking about it. Our real introduction to Australia was through the migrant hostel in a little town called Uranquinty. It had been an air force base and the buildings were the typical corrugated iron construction.

From Uranquinty my parents moved to Benalla, and from there they bought a block of land in Glendenning Street, St Albans. Here they had to build from scratch. This was in 1954, so we came just as the area was starting to grow.



After my father arrived in Australia he was contracted to work for the SEC, where he worked for many years. When we lived in St Albans my father worked at ARC Steel works at Albion, which was close to home. We didn't own a car so dad had to walk and use public transport. Luckily, Glendenning Street was close to the St Albans station and ARC was close to the Albion station, which was a bonus for dad going to and fro from work.

The house in St Albans was built in stages, one room at a time. My first memory was when there were three rooms: a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. My mother Anna was a stay-at-home mum and I remember her cooking on a primus stove, the type that people now use for camping. She cooked for the whole family on this one burner. I don't know how she managed.

Another difficult task was doing the laundry. Mum had to light the copper tub - which was situated outside - and then put the clothes in the tub and bring the water to the boil. A thick long stick - like a baseball bat - was used to poke the clothes down as they rose up while the water

boiled. The stick was also used to lift out the hot clothes that were then placed into a tub of cold water to be rinsed.

When more rooms were added to the house mum finally had a laundry and a twin concrete trough was installed. Now mum could do the washing indoors using the tin scrubbing board to rub the tough stains out from the clothes. Eventually the concrete tubs were replaced by stainless steel ones, which are still in the house today. The scrubbing board and copper tub were replaced by a wringer washing machine.

In the early days we used to have an ice cabinet, which was used to keep the food cool. I remember we had ice delivered to the home. The ice was in one BIG block - about 12 inches long and 10 inches wide and thick. Sometimes the block had to be smashed into smaller pieces to fit inside the cupboard; any tiny bits that were on the bench the three of us kids would scoop up and put into our mouths. That was our ice-pole - no flavour, but a treat for us.

The ice cabinet lasted for a year or two when eventually the yellow Astor, the round-shouldered, solid-style fridge arrived. My parents bought it second hand for 25 pounds and were very proud of their purchase. Even the neighbours came to have a look at this modern electrical appliance. This fridge lasted another 20 years before mum decided to replace it with a more up-to-date type. Now the round-shoulder type fridge is coming back into vogue and my oldest daughter, Rebecca, bought one - second hand - in Queensland for her flat, because she liked the style.

Primary School

I went to the old primary school in St. Albans and I used to love the playground equipment, which was made of all metal components in those days.

I remember the crates of small milk bottles that were delivered to the school, sitting out in the sun, and sometimes when we got the milk it was already warm and not very pleasant. We overcame this problem by buying flavoured straws. These were sold by the corner milk bar near the school. You could buy strawberry or chocolate flavoured straws. You put the straw into the milk bottle and the flavour would come through when you sucked up the milk. It was nicer than plain milk.

We also had our milk delivered every morning to our home. Sometimes I would wake up to the clinking of bottles as they rattled in their crates as the horse pulled the wagon. Once awake I would listen to the clip clop of the horse's hooves as he moved and I waited for the milkman to command the horse with either "whoa" to stop or "giddy up" to go. I remember getting out of bed and peeping through the curtains to see this sight. It was still very dark but the street light provided enough shine to see what was happening.

I didn't know any English when I first went to school, but I remember that we were taught through the John and Betty books. We had to read a sentence or a page. I got stuck on some words because I didn't know what they were, so I asked the teacher and she told me. The next day I had to read it again and I had forgotten the words. The teacher said, 'I'm not going to tell you. Ask your mum and dad.' My mum and dad couldn't read English! I was really stressed as I knew I had to find a solution. Finally I decided to go to my neighbour, Mrs Fowler, who lived across the road and asked her what it meant. She told me 'mother and father.' I remembered and learnt those words. So easy now.

Another phrase I quickly learnt was "shut up". Our neighbours on the left side of the house was Irene and John Szczapaniak. They were about 8 and 6 years old and already going to school. I was about 6. There were no fences between the properties so we used to go back and forth to each other's houses and backyards to play. This particular day we must have had a disagreement because I remember us all yelling at each other. Irene and Johnny would yell "you shut up" and my sister Janine and I would reply with "no, you shurup" they responded with "no you shut up" and we would go again "no, you shurup". We couldn't even get those words right but the

meaning got through. Mum then called us in for lunch. When we went out to play after lunch we were once again all friends.

Although I was a Catholic I never went to Catholic school. However, I did go to church regularly, once a week. The Catholic school used to hold Saturday lessons for kids from the state school who were going for their First Holy Communion and Confirmation, and I went to those classes. I remember that Father Reiss was the Parish priest for many years before Father O'Reilly took over.

The Neighbourhood

I remember the unmade roads that had gutters with the tall reeds and long grass growing beside them. There were no nature strips, only tall grass about knee high. In summertime the neighbourhood children would play outside, at one of the local paddocks or on the street, playing cricket or tag, and as it got dark we would all play hide and seek. I remember lying down near the gutter to hide from the others. Later on my imagination got away from me and I thought there could have been a snake and all these germs ... but that's what you did as a child.

Another play area for me was the local quarry not far from us opposite the present hotel. The quarry was a very deep hole, but when you are young you don't think about that. There was a fence but it had gaps. I would go to the quarry and loved going through the old rubbish. I used to bring back the coils of old bed springs and strap them to my feet and think I could jump to great heights. I was only small, about seven or eight. My mum would say don't bring any more junk home. The council decided to fill in the hole in the early 'sixties.

At first Sunshine Council wanted to use it as a rubbish dump, but there was opposition to that idea from the local rate payers. Council eventually filled it in with clean fill, and then made a sports reserve.

The Green Gully road was much steeper and more curved than it is today. There was a young man in our street, Alfred Bobek, who had one of those vintage cars. One day his brakes failed going down that Green Gully Road and he was killed. There was quite a few more accidents before the council partly filled in a section of the deep valley to improve the road.

High School

In 1963 I went to St.Albans High School, as it was known then, and it was a co-educational school. That was a real transition from primary school because of the difference in the way the school system worked. You had the one classroom and the one teacher in Grade 6. At high school you had all these different teachers for your various subjects, you had to go from one room to another, and there was a locker rather than a desk for your belongings. My sister Janine started high school a year later and my brother Joe started at St.Albans Technical School, which was a boy's school at that time, in 1966.

Wearing a uniform was quite interesting, because you had no problems in deciding what to wear. You just put on your uniform and went to school. You grabbed your bag and books that were quite heavy and you had to walk. You didn't have cars to ask your mum for a lift, you had to go by yourself.

Occasionally I used to go home for lunch, which meant a good 15 minute brisk walk to get home in Glendenning Street, and then have half an hour for lunch, then another 15 minutes of quick walking to get back to school in time. Most days I brought sandwiches from home. We had our bread delivered everyday. It was Vienna bread, not sliced. Mum made our lunch and we had this continental bread cut thickly while our Australian friends had the nice sliced bread. It's what you can't have that you want. Now I have the choice and I prefer rye or Vienna bread. I hardly ever bought lunch. Money was tight as mum was now a widow. (Dad died in 1964 at the relatively young age of 47.) Once in a while I would buy a buttered roll from the tuck shop. The rolls were

fresh; the special part of the roll was the butter. They whipped the butter with milk, I think, and aerated it making the butter very light and easy to spread. It tasted delicious.

School Uniforms

You had to have a lunch pass to get out of the school ground, because prefects stood at the gates checking everyone wanting to leave. It was good to have a pass that showed you had the authority to leave the grounds; you just showed it and it was like saying 'I can get through'. Another reason the prefects were on the gate was to make sure you had the correct uniform and wore your beret - because a lot of girls didn't want to wear them - otherwise you would get detention. If you were walking down the main street without your beret and a prefect or a teacher driving past saw you they'd actually pull over and yell out, 'Put your beret on!' Berets kept your head warm in the wintertime, but it was annoying that they were so strict about it. Nowadays it's quite different.

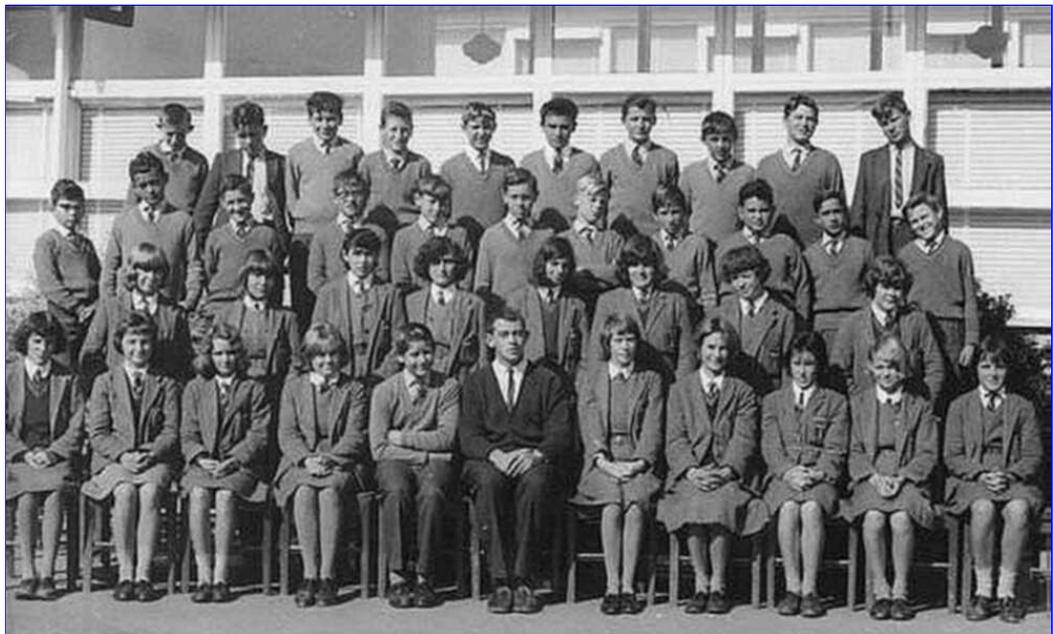
We had to have a special uniform for sports, i.e. a tunic and bloomers. We made our sports uniforms in Form 1 as part of our sewing classes. They were made of purple material and you had to buy a coloured, twisted cord - about 1 metre long and it had tassels on both ends and this was used as a belt. The colour of the cord you wore depended on the sport house you belonged to. There were four sport houses: Warratah-red, Wattle-yellow, Jacaranda-purple and Kurrajong-green, all named after Australian flowers.

Sewing and Cookery Classes

In the first year of high school it was compulsory for girls to learn sewing and you made your own cooking outfit as well as your sports uniform. The cooking outfit was an apron and a little hat. In the second year you did cooking. For the third and fourth year you had a choice: either cooking or sewing, which you did for the two years.

Teachers

I remember Mr Shaw as being a fairly strict fellow. I started off the school year by being able to see the board, and then I couldn't see it properly, so I asked my friend next to me could I copy her work to put onto my book. I was so engrossed in exchanging the information that when Mr Shaw slammed the book on my desk I jumped a mile high. I went red as a beetroot because I was really timid. I was in shock and rather upset. He didn't accuse me of cheating, but said that I was distracted, not paying attention to him and that I was disrupting the class. I thought he was picking on me. As it turned out, I soon found out why I couldn't see the board - I was shortsighted and needed glasses. Copying the teacher's notes from the person next to me was my way of getting the work done.



We had Mr Safe as a form teacher and he also taught us typing, which was unusual for a male to be teaching. Nearly everything in those days was gender specific - a woman would do the typing and a man would do the woodwork. To have a man teaching typing was different. I enjoyed typing classes and the girls thought Mr Safe was a good and fair teacher.



Irene Jozwik, on the right in the top row, with classmates and Miss Butler 1965.

Fundraising for Assembly Hall

In 1967, my last year of school, the students were asked and encouraged to raise money for the building of a hall. My fundraising plan was to do gardening. My sister Janine and I went door knocking and offering our services to do the weeding or tidying up the garden as our way of raising money for the school. It was a Saturday afternoon and we door-knocked and walked for what seemed like miles, and finally we got one job. We did about three hours of weeding. I can't remember how much we earned but at the time I thought, "Gee, that's not much for our effort and it was such hard work."

I left school before the completion of the hall so never stepped a foot inside it. (I hope to attend the school's 50th year celebration in 2006 and then have the opportunity to go inside the hall.)

Working for Whittingslow

My very first job was with the Whittingslow Carnival. I must have been fourteen or fifteen. The carnival came to town and my brother, Joe, was excited and interested in the carnival and got friendly with the people who were running the shows. He wanted a job but because he was too young they couldn't give him one. He said, 'All right, I've got an older sister, you should give her the job.' I applied and they asked me could I do arithmetic, that is, adding up and subtracting numbers. I said "yes." They needed someone to look after a stall that had clown heads moving from side to side and 4 or 5 ping pong balls were placed into the mouth of the clown. After all the balls were used I had to add up the total score and if that number was listed on the board the person won the prize. Little children always received a prize; it was a tiny gift that gave them pleasure.

I was on my feet for a long time, no sitting down at this job. Some of the local people were surprised to see me behind a stall, and some people tried to entice me into giving them a prize even if the numbers didn't correspond with the list on the board. What I didn't realise was that the boss had a chap from the carnival checking whether I was being honest or not. Obviously I was, and at the end of the day they paid me really quite well and asked if I'd like more work during the school holidays at the Exhibition Building. So it pays to be honest. That was my very first job. I've never forgotten that nice, exciting carnival atmosphere and experience.

Working for Dr Balabin

I left school at end of 1967 after completing the Leaving Certificate. My first permanent job was with Doctor Balabin and Dr Liszukiewicz, who was better known as Dr Henry because people had trouble saying his difficult surname. Working at the surgery was interesting because they never used appointments. You just had to arrive, present yourself to the front desk, give your name so the files could be retrieved, and then wait your turn.

The surgery had tried an appointment system, but a lot of the migrants didn't understand how that worked. Sometimes people had waited for one-and-a-half hours and they would be getting quite irate because they were waiting their turn and other people who had an appointment would come at 10 o'clock and then be seen almost straight away. The people who were waiting may have been allotted 11 o'clock and they'd say, "why is he going in before me when I've been here all this time?" It caused confusion, so in the end Dr Balabin did away with appointments. It was first come first served; they just had to wait their turn. This is when the waiting became very long 2 to 3 hours, so people learnt and arrived early and waited before the doors were open to be first in line. If there was an emergency these people had to be seen first so patients sometimes had to wait even longer than two hours. People would sometimes say, 'I just need an injection,' so the doctor would slip them in line, but even the five or ten minutes giving that injection would put his schedule further and further behind.

Dr Balabin saw more patients and this was due to the fact that he prescribed "The Pill". The pill was a controversial issue for some people and Dr Henry would not prescribe it for religious reasons; consequently, more patients went to Dr Balabin.

Both doctors did home visits and that used to cause problems too. Both worked very long hours. The morning session would be from 9am and finish after the last patient was seen, sometimes after 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock. Dr Balabin used to live next door to the surgery and would go home for a quick lunch; he was lucky to get a half an hour. Then he'd do the home visits, and depending where it was it could be five to ten minutes driving, or it could be twenty minutes. He'd have to diagnose the situation and that would take another half hour. If he had two home visits that could mean a delay in starting the afternoon session, which began at 3 o'clock and the

last person would be seen about 8 o'clock. However he was always running late with his schedule and most evenings would end at 9 pm or later.

I worked four days dayshift and one day afternoon shift, from 3pm to 9pm. At lunchtime I would walk home for lunch, just as I had while I was at school, and Mum would have lunch ready for me. I didn't have a car and was used to walking. I didn't want to stay in the office to have lunch because you would get caught up with the work situation. At the surgery it was always busy and I needed my lunchtime away to cope for the afternoon session.

After two and a half years I felt it was time for a change. My friends were saying how wonderful it was to work in the city, so I decided to do that.

Department of Supply

I started working with the Department of Supply in the city and worked there for about ten years, doing clerical work. It was such a change of pace. Working for the doctor everything was busy busy busy, go go go. When I went to the Department they gave me filing and I'd be finished in half a day, depending on how much there was. They were amazed and asked me to slow down. They said that was a week's work. It was hard to convert to their pace. Now everyone is under pressure to perform, aren't they?

When I joined the public service I came across Helen Czernik who was also working there. We recognised each other from high school, because Helen was a friend of my younger sister Janine. Working together kept us in touch all this time and we became close friends.

Marriage

On the 27th February 1971 I married Vladimir Lenc, who was also from St Albans. We originally met at the YCW dance that the Catholic Church organized. It was held once a month on a Sunday. The dance was in a hall and a live band provided the music. There was strict control at the door entrance, sometimes by Fr O'Reilly. No alcohol or smoking was allowed in the hall. Vlad and I started going out, and after two years of dating we decided to get married. He and I were each twenty years old, which is young nowadays to get married.

Travelling in Europe

Before we had children Vlad and I went to Europe for twelve months holiday. We had been married for about five years and Vlad wanted to go back to Croatia, because that was his place of origin. I'm glad I travelled with somebody who had experienced life in Europe as it made things easier to cope with. It was very much an eye-opener for me. The experience made me aware of different cultures and trying to communicate in a foreign country made me realize the hardship migrants had to cope with coming out to Australia. We bought a combi van in England and then travelled all over Europe. As well as Yugoslavia we went to Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, France, Greece, Turkey, and even Morocco. Eventually we went to Poland, but that was only a three-day pause. It took us a day to get there, we stayed a day, and then it was a day to get back.

I remember Mum, Dad, and other people saying how wonderful Poland was. When I went there I thought it was drab. I went to Krakow and thought it was a dirty old city, but now I realise I didn't appreciate the history. One day was not enough. I also thought "home is where the heart is". My parents came from Poland and, no matter what I thought of it, to them Poland would always hold a special place in their hearts, just as Australia did to me when I was travelling.

The reason we went to Krakow was that when we were camping in Italy we met some Polish people. They were doctors and invited us to come, saying 'whenever you are in Poland, come and visit us.' We had no intention at the time so continued with our travels, but then had a bit of spare time and decided to try Poland. The doctors made us welcome and provided us with

accommodation in their apartment. They lived in a one bedroom apartment the parents used the bedroom while their son slept on the couch that was unfolded every evening to make a bed. That was his sleeping quarters. They had a small kitchen and a dining-living room combined. They took us out to a restaurant that evening and we had authentic Polish food. It was great.

When we were in East Germany it was highly tense. The streets were patrolled by military police in uniforms and they carried rifles. The country was under the control of the Communist regime; this was in 1975. We weren't used to seeing police with rifles and found this very intimidating. This experience of witnessing a political, military-controlled country made me appreciate how good Australia is. There's no place like home.

Current Situation

My first daughter Rebecca was born after our travelling experience and I took twelve months maternity leave from work. When I returned to the Department I stayed for another five years before having my second baby, Kymberly, and then I retired from the public service. That's when we moved to Belgrave.

Vlad loves the hills and the trees, the peace and quiet. When we were looking around for a place to live we chose Belgrave. We moved into the house in January 1983, just before the Ash Wednesday bush fires. We experienced a very stressful day and were very fortunate not to get burnt out.

Over the years Vlad was doing subcontract work while I was a stay-at-home mum. When Kym was in grade 6, I decided to look for a part-time job. I found a position as a receptionist with the local optometrist in Belgrave. It was a job-share situation, my part being three days a week. I stayed for 13 years and have just recently resigned.

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Both my daughters went to university. Rebecca, the oldest, graduated as Bachelor of Science and is now employed by the Gold Coast Council in Queensland as a Microbiological Science Officer, testing water and doing lab work.

The younger one, Kym, has a double degree and is a secondary school teacher. She teaches physical education and science. She's going very well at present and enjoying her career.

Janine, my sister, married and had two children, Christopher and Nicole Rosbergen, and moved to Ballarat to live.

My father-in-law, Ivan Lenc, still lives in St Albans as does my brother and his wife, Sue, and their two children, Jason and Justin Jozwik. I visit them regularly. My good friend Elizabeth Tucker nee Mleko from high school also lives in the area.

St Albans still holds many good childhood memories for me, that's why I'm interested in its history.

Irene Lenc, 2005