

ROSEMARY KEEGAN: STUDENT 1960 - 1963



Introduction

Rosemary Keegan attended St Albans High School from 1960 to 1963. 1963 at St Albans High was unique because it was the first year that Matriculation classes were taught at the school. The high school had started in 1956 but in previous years there had never been the required number of students staying on to justify holding final-year classes. Rosemary and her classmates were thus the first Form Sixers who graduated from the school at that level. The matric year comprised of 27 students. There were 8 girls and 9 boys in the humanities stream and 10 boys in the science stream.

A Biography

My father was Irish, from Waterford; my mother English, from London. They met in London during the Blitz in World War II and married in October of 1944. My mother served as a WAAF during the war (Womens Auxillary Air Force) and worked as a personal assistant to an Air Commodore at the Air Ministry. My father was on 'reserved occupation' at BTH in London working on leading-edge wiring. They came to Australia in early 1949 on assisted passage, migrants known wryly as 'ten-pound Poms'. I was three years old and, at that time, their only child.

At first they lived in Sydney, but there was a General Strike at the time, and my father could not find work. Eventually he found a position in Tasmania, at the Goliath Cement Works in Railton. The position came with a house and so we lived for a few years in Railton before moving to Devonport.

I began school at Our Lady of Lourdes in Devonport. My sister Angela was born in Devonport in 1952. As a child, I recall being envious of my sister because she had been born in Australia - and when we later came to live in St. Albans, my sister was one of the very few children at school who had actually been born in this country. My sister, on the other hand, says she always envied me for being born in London - and at Queen Charlotte's hospital - which she says has had something to do with 'The Beatles'.

My mother was homesick for England so we spent a year there in the mid fifties living in London with my grandmother in St. John's Wood and returned to Australia to live in Melbourne. My father, being employed as a bookkeeper at Olympic Tyre in Footscray, looked for a place to live somewhere closer to work. He heard that there was a new development in the western area, a new suburb St. Albans, and some of his work colleagues had already gone to live there. At the time we considered the landscape there as a kind of 'outback'.

Then, St. Albans was the last railway station on the line, the streets were unmade and my sister remembers that we used to wear our gum boots to walk to the station whenever we were going into the city, as the roads were usually so muddy. We used to leave our boots under one of the seats at the station - and put them back on again when we got home. They were always there.

We lived in one of those small 'skillion' houses on a block of land at No. 8 Erica Avenue - our family of four, mother, father, and we two sisters Angela and Rosemary. Everyone in our street lived in a similar dwelling. The idea was, that when the 'house' and land had been paid off, you would then build onto the original structure and complete a proper house. Which is what we did - as did most of those around us. Our finished house was a typical 1950's weatherboard and it was

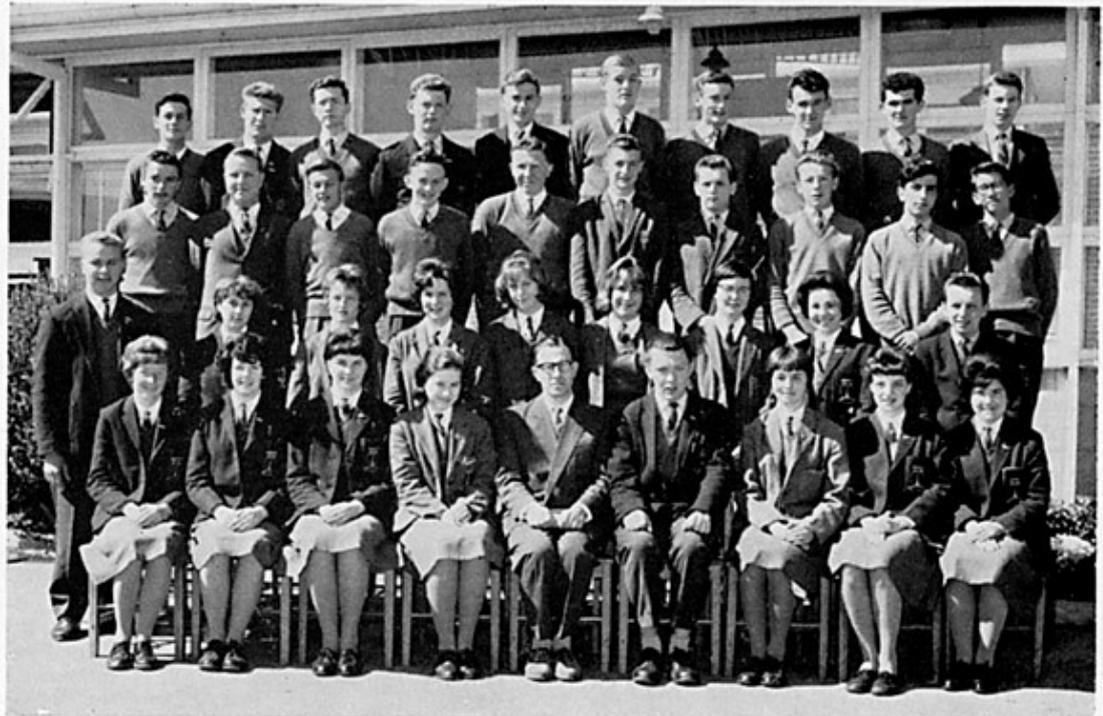
painted blue. My father had a sign made with the name of the house "Roseanne" after his daughters.

The house had not long been finished when my father, aged 49, died suddenly from a heart attack on the morning of August 11th 1958 - my mother widowed at the age of 35. She then met Stepan Mihalik whose own wife had died in Yugoslavia and who had come to Australia with his then four year old daughter. I seem to remember that Steve (as we called him) had been living in our same street. In any case, they were married by Father Reis at the Sacred Heart Church in St. Albans where my father, as a good Irish Catholic had been a member of the Holy Name Society. Many years later, my little sister, Angela, was married in the same church - by Fr. Reis - to Tommy West, whose family - British father, Greek mother - also lived in St. Albans.

For the eight years that I lived in St. Albans - all the time at 8 Erica Avenue - I spent four years - years 5, 6, 7, and 8, at the local Sacred Heart parish school and four years at St. Albans High School in forms 3,4, 5, and 6.

I am enormously grateful for the way I was taught at St. Albans High. The nuns, at primary school, had told us, had led us to believe, that the 'secular' teachers wouldn't care for us the way they, the nuns, would. I found exactly the opposite. In the four years at the high school I was taught by wonderful teachers. The most influential teacher in all of my education was Mr. George Strauss - later Dr. Strauss after he completed a Ph. D. at Melbourne University in French literature - on the role of the devil in the works of Andre Gide. Mr. Strauss had been a young Jewish boy sent to England to escape the barbarity that was occurring in Germany during the 1930s and 40s. He gave us a love of learning and a belief in personal integrity.

He was particularly drawn to a group of students among us who, he said admiringly, not only read European works of literature but read them in their original languages. These were the children of European parents who had been displaced by the war and who, more often than not, were professional people; chemists, engineers, educators, in their own pre-war countries. I was not one of those multilingual Europeans - but, I was part of the group who wanted the sort of education which was being offered to us. In the end, even though I was not gifted in languages as my European friends were, Mr Strauss had me reading the works of Andre Gide in French.



Form 5A

Back Row: T. Caravatas, M. Neskov, B. Bruhns, V. Troszczyj, J. Dasler, P. Becker, I. Sharp, L. Cameron, F. Richardt, R. Clifford. **Third Row:** J. V. Manic, K. Kulbys, B. Kokot, R. Chatterton, V. Bobko, B. Wale, C. Dunkley, M. Bowkun, C. Evangelidis, A. Laskowski. **Second Row:** B. Gerlinger, A. Kassor, J. Arnautovic, J. Iredale, J. Beynon, C. Dusting, H. Henschke, I. Dynak, R. Wiatr. **Front Row:** R. Andrews, E. Taylor, S. Demschychyn, S. Gunew, Mr. G. Straus, P. Tucker, N. Ostepeev, R. Keegan, R. Kiss.

In 1963, we were the very first matriculation class St Albans High had ever had, and as in some education circles we were considered to be dis-advantaged, the Education Department sent us a group of extraordinary teachers who guided us through that year - including Mrs. Alison Gliddon, Mr. Alcorn, and others whose names I've forgotten - as well as our long time, much loved Mr. (Doc) Walsh who had taught us history all through the lower forms and who, as well as Mr. Alcorn, taught the matric history subjects. During that final year Mr. Walsh - who loved theatre - directed us in a play, "The Winslow Boy" by Terence Rattigan. I had the part of Kate, the boy's older sister, and I remember the excitement of going to a Melbourne theatre company's costume department to select out costumes.

Most of our matric class went on to university. I think most went to Melbourne.

I do remember that there were several "Exhibitions" gained by students in our class. It was also the era of "Commonwealth Scholarships" brought in by Robert Menzies and there were quite a few scholarships awarded to that year also.



M Bowkun, V Mahorin, C Castagna, R Kiss, Mr Conroy, Mrs Gliddon, S Gunew, R Keegan; 1963.

I still remember hearing the news of President Kennedy's assassination in November, around the time our our exams.

I went to Melbourne Uni in 1964 with a number of my friends from that class. Rosemary Kiss and Sneja Gunew went to live in residence at University Women's College (as it was called then) and I went to live in residence at St. Mary's Hall which was affiliated with Newman College and housed in a great old mansion on The Avenue in Parkville, (now Treacey House) - a few years before the new St. Mary's residence was built on land next door to Newman.

It was as a result of receiving a Commonwealth Scholarship that I was able to attend university and live in residence and I am grateful for this always.

But it was Mr. Strauss who was instrumental in my enrolling in the four year degree in the School of English Language and Literature. (We called it "Pure English" in those days) He had been so right about the way I'd learned so far that I took his advice in this too. He had, for instance, introduced us to the novels of Patrick White. I still have a first edition copy of *Riders in the Chariot*. I think Patrick White, in this novel, was one of the first novelists to write so seriously about the Holocaust - as he did with the character of Himmelfarb. Throughout the years I lived in Canada I read and re-read the works of Patrick White and the wonderful biography by David Marr - as a treasured resource when I was away from Australia.

After I'd finished my degree I went overseas with Australian Volunteers Abroad - and taught in Malacca at both Yok Bin High School - where I taught English - and at Malacca High School where I taught the upper and lower sixth form the English Literature course to those preparing for the Cambridge 'A' Level exams.

When I returned to Australia I met Terry Blake and we married in December of 1969, Melbourne at the Newman College Chapel. Terry was completing his Ph.D in Science at Melbourne and his first job was at ANU where he taught for a few years before coming back as a lecturer at Melbourne Uni. Whilst on sabbatical leave from Melbourne Uni my husband was offered a position at the University of Toronto. We moved to Canada as what was known as "Landed Immigrants" in 1978 after having spent that year before in Alberta. We lived in Canada for 28 years - a couple of them in Calgary, the rest in Toronto. When the Australian government allowed people to have dual citizenship we took out Canadian citizenship. This was after having lived there for about 24 years. We had not wanted to lose our Australian citizenship and so we waited until that was permitted. I can't relay the pride - and relief - I felt when we attended the ceremony. I also feel gratitude to the Canadian government for its openness to those who come there to live. And as corny as that may sound, I am proud to be Canadian. (I guess I will never try to stand for parliament here.)

During our matric year, our school took part in a school's debating programme. We ended up in the finals of that contest. The finals were filmed on TV on a Saturday afternoon. Our team consisted of three girls - Rosemary Kiss, Sneja Gunew and myself (known then as Terri Keegan). The topic was "There should be equal pay for equal work" - or something similar. We were pitted against a catholic boys school. They had to agree with the proposition. We had to oppose. I think we lost the finals, but I think it was popular opinion that we ought to have won. When the compere came into our dressing rooms before the telecast to gather some information on us, he said in a weary voice, "Oh, and I suppose you all want to become high school teachers." We surprised him. Sneja said she intended to become a literary critic, Rosemary Kiss, a pharmacologist, and I replied 'I am going to be a theologian'. In the televised introductions the compere said, when he was introducing me, "And *she* says *she's* going to become a theologian."

Father Conrad Reiss, next morning, after mass said to me, "What the bloody hell is a woman theologian!" In contrast, Mr Alcorn, at school the next day said, with great kindness, "I heard something rather lovely on television yesterday." He had taken me so seriously I had not the heart to explain that I had just been joking. He lent me books by Kant and Kierkegaard - which I read, struggling, hardly understanding a thing. Strangely, though, whilst we lived in Canada, I completed two post graduate degrees from the University of Toronto's School of Theology. Mr. Alcorn, I thank you for your interest - and prescience.

Ten years ago we returned to Australia when my husband retired from the University of Toronto. We now live in Geelong. My sister lives in Clifton Springs.

Unfortunately our three children are scattered - a daughter and granddaughters in New Zealand, one son in Toronto still, and another son in Sydney. We get together each year in Lorne in the weeks before Christmas.

Just before we returned at the end of 2007, my collection *Wintering* was published in Canada by Ekstasis Editions. Some of the poems recall those years in St. Albans, in the western suburbs.

Menu

[People](#)

[Photos](#)

[History](#)

[Albas](#)

[Top of Page](#)

[Home Page](#)



Braids

My mother asks me if I remember
Philip Camilleri, from Sister Josephine's class
in the fifth grade.

*He remembers you, she says.
He remembers your hair tied back.*

But I don't remember Philip Camilleri
from the fifth grade -
just the long hair braided
painfully each morning
into tartan ribbons

and I can hear us singing
Adverbs modify verbs
with a kind of lilt in the words

a row of poplars
on the municipal road outside
the classroom windows, sunlight
on the yellow desks, the backs of chairs.

Rosemary Blake nee Keegan

School photograph reproduction courtesy of Nick Szwed.