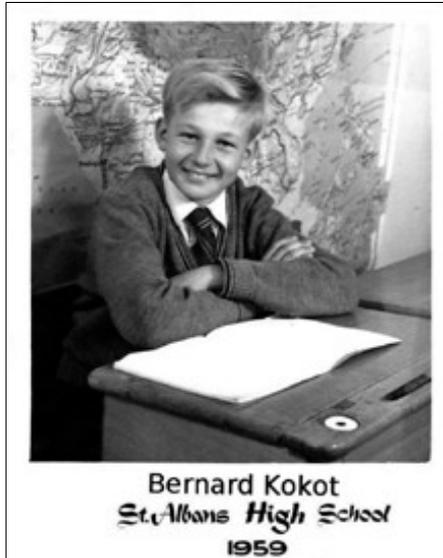


BERNARD KOKOT: DESPATCH CLERK, FISHERMAN, FREELANCE WRITER

The History of St Albans from a Kid's Perspective: 1950s and 1960s.



Arrival

I have many fond memories of St Albans. Just as background, the Kokots arrived in Australia on the "Hellenic Prince" landing in Fremantle, W.A., 1950 as Polish emigrants, including me at the age of four with mum and dad. I still remember some of the trip, especially when we docked in the Suez Canal, It would have been Cairo, and the ship's crew sending down a rope with baskets of cigarettes to Arabs in wooden boats below in exchange for Arabian carpets. There was often great rage by the ship's Greek crew when the cigarettes were taken but no carpets sent up in return. I can still hear the sailors swearing today. It was a coincidence in 2001 when I moved from St Albans to Howlong, NSW, and met a German lady neighbour who arrived to Australia on the

same ship ... and the same date.

The ship finished the journey at Melbourne where we docked in Melbourne on Anzac Day 1950. Due to the festivities, and being a public holiday, we could not disembark. There were the marches, speeches and everybody later to the pub so hence we sat on board till the next day.

From Melbourne we went to Mildura Camp for a short while, then we lived at the Bonegilla barracks near Wodonga for about 10 months. At four years of age I recall women swatting large Huntsmen spiders from the ceilings inside the barracks with straw brooms. A close eye was kept on us kids as black snakes were common. Polish migrants were the last to complain since the food and freedom was much better than the country they left after the war. The Aussie heat however was a certain change, having left Germany in a snowy winter just a few months prior. Then in 1951 the old man bought a block, now 1 Scott Avenue, St Albans.

Friends and Neighbours

I went to St. Albans State School in West Esplanade up to grade 4, then for Grade 5 and 6 I went to Sacred Heart so as to make my first communion, then onto St. Albans High School until 1964. As all schoolboys do, we all had our own little "circle" at St. Albans High. The vagabonds I remember well, to name a few Polskis and Ukrainians were : Anthony Laskowski, Michael Kadniak, Tony Wyka, Jerry Sawczuk, Eddie Lacinski, Vladimir Bobko, Michael Chabiera, Eugene (Froggy) Frolczenko, the Bezborrowoff brothers Eugene and Vlad, Joe and Stan Maziarz, Alex Korinfski, Gus Hyrgatus, Jesse Rutkowski, Joe Zdroewski, Ian Niedzwicki, Richard Zabieglik, Richard Link, Stan Zawadski, Andy Lubicz, Wishi Dawidowicz, Marian Rozczak, Charlie Chircop, Johnnie Mazurak, Klaus Becker ... the list goes on! I have some early photos of those days. I am lucky now that even at 69 years of age my memory is still undulled and sharp as a tack. Since "The History of St Albans" has lately come to revival, it has been my intent and priority to put to paper much memorabilia. Old memories are so important.



Mrs Olga Kokot carrying laundry basket, Bonegilla, 1950.

I still have a remnant population in my circle of friends from the 1950's St Albans genre ... Polski's ... Germans ... Ukrainians et al. I will even throw in the magnificent contributions the Maltese made in what St Albans once was, but now demographically modified.

I am still in contact with old friends who are ageing disgracefully ... such as Ish Niedzwecki ... now living in Deniliquin some many years. I speak with Ish three to four times a week. Ish was the person who revived this "Old Polski's St Albans nostalgia / memories" stuff and the continuing camaraderie between myself and Ish ... and now sadly last 12 months deceased Zbignew ("Joe" aka "Zed") Zdroiewski ... early boys of Cornhill and Hook streets, St Albans.

I still maintain a bi-annual communiqué with Jan Dworecki. My Polski "paparazzi" mates in St Albans keep me weekly informed on the local scene. I am a freelance writer, mostly fishing-related techno-science / heavy research stuff ... and now just closing off some heavily academic papers. I have read the current history book and there is a lot that can be added, so I give you "The History of St. Albans from a Kid's Perspective 1950s and 1960s."

The book brought back some fond memories of our early days as St Albans kids, particularly from the early 1950s. In conjunction with a few past colleagues of that era we thought our recollections would add a little to the overall story. Most of us are now just either side of 70, a remnant few have retained St Albans as their home, some have moved to nearby locales and several interstate. The concept for this anthology was promulgated by Joseph Ribarow and much input and nostalgia contributed by the late Joe (Zed) Zdroewski and still quite animate Ian Niedzweiki now living in Deniliquin NSW. Myself, Bernie Kokot, lives in Howlong NSW, having moved here from St Albans in 2001.

In general our parents were all migrants of around the 1950s of Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and German descent, then followed by Latvians, Lithuanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians and Czechoslovakians. Later arrivals circa the 1960s were the Maltese. It's not important to be chronologically precise, nor specific to use names, but it was the kids of that early era that bring back those fond recollections. I write this story "off the top of my head" to the best time frame I can recall. Having just turned four years of age, I landed in Australia at Fremantle on Anzac Day 1950, having sailed from Germany on the "Hellenic Prince". There was a short spell in a camp at Mildura, then onto Bonegilla. We lived in Mentone for some 12 months during which time my father worked as a cook at a prominent Racing Stable earning money to build our one-room fibro bungalow in Scott Avenue, St Albans, in 1951.

Father's Work

A little bit of history to go with that of my old man goes like this: still learning fluency in English was no barrier to early European men seeking immediate work and many found this at Victoria Railways. The Poles, Germans, Ukrainian and similar Slavs were readily accepted in the



early 1950s as hard workers and fast learners. Their objective was to earn money to promptly start building a house. I still have somewhere my father's book of wages paid in his first job as a car (train) cleaner at Dynon Road Railway Yards, Melbourne. A week's pay was then 5 pounds five shillings. He also did some work at the Victorian Railways workshops at Newport and that job was extra "overtime" hours on that same evening having finished work at Dynon Road. During annual leave with the railways my father worked for that three weeks on the canning line at Smorgon's Meats factory in Somerville Rd. Yarraville. (The Smorgons then were good employers of European migrants.) In order to purchase a suit for my Confirmation, my father in-between did some labouring work at the ICI factory in Deer Park. The nature of the work was carting away blue-stone rock in wheel barrows as part of the ICI factory

extensions.

My mother and several of the 1950's emigrant ladies from St Albans found work at Bradford Cotton Mills in Footscray. This mill at the time was a major producer of rayon string used in the manufacture of tarpaulins for the Australian Army.

During that time as a kid I never went without. I was always well fed and dressed and it was from our parents we learned that if you ever bought anything it was with cash payment. In the instance of promissory payment on "next pay day" any credit purchases, always building materials from Steven's Hardware in St Albans, was duly paid on time and to the letter. My parents never borrowed any money from friends although a few Polskis did "diddle" my father on occasions taking advantage of his generosity.

Those days were indeed ones in which we as kids, were brought up to respect society and the law, where a foot-in-the-bum from the local copper was sufficient to instill discipline. I think the greatest "crime" I committed as a juvenile was to knick some apricots over another's fence, and at one time when about 10 years old, I stole 3 cigarettes from my old man's packet and got sprung. But what kid didn't do that anyway?



Early St Albans

St Albans was just vast flat paddocks. Given a tall ladder, one could have a 360 degree unobstructed view, the only landmark being the old St Albans Railway Station and the then ICI Munitions factory on Ballarat Road, Albion. Early recollections are of me being sent to the Railway Station with two buckets to bring back water to our block, the frequent explosions at the

ICI factory and ammo storage bunkers in the paddock across from our bungalow, and after heavy rain, the quagmire of our Scott Avenue and Andrea Street corner. I lose count of how many times the nightsoil (dunny) truck got bogged and I can still picture the postmen, John Dougherty and later Mr. Batty, battling through the mud to far-spread mail boxes.

That was about the time the first house was being built behind our block and another half way up Glendenning Street. Dad's Polish friend Janek and a Mr Nosal were from Pennell Avenue. The late Mr. Eugene Czyzewski lived at 43 Pennell Avenue and they were my mum and dad's closest Polish friends - Mr C. was connected with the Polish community in Victoria. Another good Polish friend was a Mr. Mielewski who was a St. Albans Polish community figurehead in the fifties. He used to organise a lot of bus outings and socials for us migrant families to (say) Daylesford and apple picking at Bacchus Marsh. I think he was also a committee member of the Polonia Soccer Club. (He was also the Santa Claus I mentioned in earlier memoirs.)

I recall our bungalow had a kitchen sink (concrete wash trough) and bench inside behind the window. The rest was open plan but comfortable, with a lino floor, the walls Masonite lined. We had a small wood stove that used briquettes. Lighting was by kerosene lantern and cooking on a small single burner "Primus". The toilet was the iconic Thunderbox near the backyard chook shed. The pigeon coop provided some memorable meals!

There's a gap in memory of any mates I had until I started at the State School in West Esplanade in 1952 where some camaraderie developed with a friend who helped carry in the cases of small bottles of milk, many that had their tin-foil tops pierced by magpies. I made other friends when I was sent to Sacred Heart Catholic School at Grade 4 when I also met others in the First St Albans Scouts: the Scoutmaster then as I recall, was Mr. Micallef. We had to bring sixpence that often was naughtily spent on lollies at the old Corner Milk Bar in Amy Street opposite the then Butcher's shop, later Des Barnard's pet produce store.

I can recall going to that Post Office with Mum in the mid fifties to send aid parcels (mostly of soft goods like Australian wool jumpers and Onkaparinga blankets) to her less-privileged sister then still under Communist regime in Ukraine. There are also my early memories of both Mum and Dad sending similar, plus then Australian Pounds, either in those parcels or paper money enveloped in newspaper sheets in a letter. This was done with parents going into Melbourne by train and lodging that dispatch through the Polish forwarding company "Contal & Co". There were many dismays when my parents received a letter from their overseas kin advising that the woollen goods were received, albeit parcels opened and resealed, but the money in the envelope was missing. There was obviously a lot of thievery at the Russian post office end.

Outings

I met other friends when our parents would go to the early versions of a "dinner dance" in the Glengala Hall. Adult associations developed as did children's at those venues. Mr Zuk was one of our first Polish friends to have a car about 1952. Visits were always a great joy to us kids but more so such friends provided transport for parents to socialise at evening dances at Glengala Hall and other venues outside the then limited hours when trains ran. I remember a picnic at Lake Wendoree, Ballarat, in 1953. Escaping from the St Albans' summer heat we piled in Aussie neighbour's Chevrolet truck for a day's outing to Wendoree, Daylesford, Bostock or Moorabool Reservoirs. At Christmas on the return journey home the back of the truck was overhung with a few Christmas pine trees.

Mr and Mrs Sroka were good friends of my mum and dad and arrived in St Albans near the same date as we did. The Srokas built their house sort of around the middle of Glendenning Street, a few doors down from the Blahuts. Their son, Joe Sroka, was my age and we were good friends as I was with John Blahut. I think Joe Sroka went to Sunshine Tech and I recall him still being around circa 1990s working in the plumbing and roofing trade.



The Koliba and Hercelinsky parents were good friends with my parents as were Mr and Mrs Babicz. Other familiar names are Kopoczinski and Mr Giraffa. I remember Stan Koliba as well. Richard Link also lived in Kate Street. Stan Zawadski similarly thereabouts. Richard Link and I were friends in St Albans again from 1987 when I returned after 12 years living in Sydney. I was told by Jan Dworecki (still at Main Road West) last year that Richard Link passed away. I also remember my parents being friendly with Mr. Linkiewicz, as distinct to Link I presume. Mr. Jablonski also lived 4 doors up from us in Scott Avenue.

In Cornhill Street and nearby, other Polish names are Gus Hrygatus, Michael Kadniak, Anthony Laskowski (dec) and the Rutkowski family, the boys then Jesse and Roman, two girls also but I only remember Anna. Mitko Neskov was a later arrival to Scott Avenue. In Pennell Avenue were the Wroblewski (son Robert), Anna and Maria and

brother Dobrowolski , and then cousin the Ukrainian Tony Bayliss. The Belacic boys also across the road. The Sikorskis were very close friends of my parents, as was their son Frank as a mate of mine. Mr. Jim Shanley at 30 Scott Avenue was my Confirmation sponsor. Up north behind Biggs Street where there is an industrial complex, lived the Belkos who were family friends. Johnny Belko became a butcher and for a while had a shop in Main Road East near Ungers. Also in Scott Avenue were the Svares, also being friends on ours. Vladys Svares got killed in his Austin A70 at the bottom of Green Gully.

Growing Up

At about six years of age all the kids developed their “independence” with their first bicycle. At that age of six we were entrusted to virtually go anywhere on our own. My first big solo ride was to attend Tony Landrigan’s sixth birthday party at Landrigan’s farm, then on Taylors Road just before Gourlays Road. We all slept in the hayshed which was a real buzz for a youngster. Around that time my father would also dink me on the bicycle to the old Taylor’s Lake (dam). We would fish for eels till midnight.

One of the first priorities our migrant parents had was to buy a radio. The ABC then ran a program on how to speak English and most of us kids of that genre might remember that after that program finished we were allowed at 6 p.m. to listen to the Air Adventures of Biggles, then followed by Hop Harrigan. If you were good, you were allowed to listen to D24 with that haunting voice of Roland Strong. After that the older folks would listen to Radio Moscow or German Radio on short wave.

At age eight I recall going to Victoria Market with my father bringing home a small butchered pig. The head was used for making 'galareta' (pork in aspic). Hocks were smoked as was belly pork made into Kaiser Fleisch bacon. My father constructed a rudimentary outdoor BBQ cum smoker in the back yard veggie patch. The butchered pig would also provide us with Pork lard. The Victoria Market gave you variety whereas the local butchers primarily sold mutton with beef an expensive rarity set aside for 'special' Aussie customers.

Our back yard had a veggie patch with fruit trees and garden growing prolific from mum's gardening skills gained as a young woman working on a collective farm in her home country, the Ukraine. We had a variety of fresh veggies, berries and a grapevine. Invasive rabbits were more than welcome as an addition to the cooking pot! Sunday was always home grown chooks.

With a few more houses popping up in the nearby streets we cemented more friendships although it was customary then that each locale had its own little “gang”. There was never any rivalry as the term gang may suggest. Well, not until the prelude to bonfire night on “Guy Fawkes” when there were many raids on each other's bonfire stacks to pinch old car tyres. Our mob had the biggest ever bonfire with 64 car tyres that left an ember residue, where three days later we were still baking potatoes in the ashes. Despite no aluminium foil in those days the spuds tasted a treat.



Adventures

The building of red gum paling fences around houses offered plenty of scrap timber from which to build billy-carts. Axles and pram wheels were sourced from the then St Albans tip, now the Soccer Ground in McKechnie Street opposite the St Albans Hotel. I have no idea how many nails we pilfered from our father's wooden tool box to hold the round axles onto to our chariots. Wire staples were also pilfered to use in shanghais, not to mention the lengths of lead-solder rod ... and the old man's valuable nuts and bolts and woodscrews ... as the projectiles for our “penny-bunger” cracker guns made from a metal bicycle pump tube. That tip (bluestone quarry initially) was a testing ground for many of these contraptions and a playground for some dare-devilry, jumping from the layers of “springs” or swarf (metal shavings) ex the H.V. McKay works in Sunshine.

I also recall the “Volcanoes”. The scoria quarry, now the foundation of Kruger's Truck Works at the entrance to the St Albans Uni Campus ... the other on Taylors Road upon which Melbourne Waters storage tanks stand. Not only were these also billy-cart testing grounds, but when the excavations filled with water, we would boat on them in half 44 gallon drums. Few of us in those days knew how to swim! No youngster in those days would forget the “Biggs Street Swimming Hole” or the “Green Gully Swimming Hole”. The Biggs Street one claimed many a cyclist when brakes ran out on the descent. Worse were the buckled wheels and flat tyres in pushing it back uphill to home in 40 degree heat with an inch of hot lemonade left in the old R.M. Mosely wooden screw-bung stopper. Eric Alan's Bicycle Shop, Alfrieda Street, however provided undying bike parts replacement and repairs.

The Green Gully swim-hole also provided similar challenges. Being the new tip then, we would stop off to shoot rats and snakes with all sorts of home made "Zip Guns". Afterwards and ever fatigued after many hours swimming, to get up the Green Gully hill it was just a matter of waiting for a slow moving truck, and, on one's bicycle, hang onto the back of the truck for a tow to the top. We never seemed to come to any peril be it from this activity, or diving from the top-most branches of the gum tree at the swimming hole. This usually followed a belly full of green, unripe apricots that were nicked in the orchard alongside the river, often avoiding a few shots in the backside from 12-gauge shotgun salt pellets!

On quieter week days we would go fishing in the Maribyrnong River. Jumping a few years ahead to about age 12 and first year at St Alban's High School, a schoolmate and I would wag afternoon sports times to go fishing here and several times got sprung by our teacher. The punishment was being barred from going on any school excursions. Both my friend and I were then quite artistic and created mature written "sick-notes" forging our parents' signatures. It has always been a mystery how that teacher knew where we went, or who was dobbing us in. He eventually gave up when we changed our fishing venue to Jackson's Creek at the Organ Pipes that provided better cover. The Arundel Bridge, Keilor, was also a popular swimming hole.

Other "pastimes" were spent by some at McTaggart's Riding School at the top end of Main Road West in the paddocks near the piggery. That was my first and only ride on a horse having been bucked off and very unceremoniously bruised.



McTaggart's Riding School, Main Road West, St Albans.

We also often got bruised nicking a loaf of fresh bread and falling from the back footstep of the horse and cart baker that did the rounds of St Albans. I recall the bakery then being in Main Road West, this side of the present Railway Station. The bakery was a very welcome arrival as one could only buy bread (pre-order) at Wardle's Store. There was still a little animosity in those mid-fifties towards us "non-Aussies" even though we were Naturalised. I recall my mother buying biscuits for me but she was told she could only have the broken ones as the intact ones were only for "special customers".

One photo I wish I would have taken in the 1950s was the corner Milk Bar ... its frontage to Main Road West and its side Amy Street - the short street along which Des Barnard's Produce shop is sited opposite. I still have a vivid image of that shop in my mind and have wanted for a while to get out my colour pencils and sketch the old green weatherboard house and the massive cyprus pine on the western edge of what is now Amy street. It was "The Shop" for those living on the Main Road West side. The shop had several owners over its duration: Maltese and perhaps Lybian or Turkish at another time. In reality it was good competition to Wardle's General store.

One highlight I remember was a stormy December day, where leaving the milk bar, I crossed the dirt and narrow Main Road West, stepping over a shallow scoria stone fence as a short cut via vacant blocks. I would have been 6 years or so at that time. All of a sudden a massive lightning bolt struck some few feet in front of me, bowling me over backwards. The only damage was the two bottles of Lemonade (with those wooden screw cap, thick glass bottles I was toting) broke, and I severely gashed my hand.

Progress

In those similar years when many of us moved from our fibro bungalows into recently built houses. Our first block was at 1 Scott and diagonally opposite us was a second home at 3 Pennell Avenue where our first neighbours lived - they were Chas and Jean Robertson and son Ron. They moved from Essendon into their self-built cottage. A great Aussie friend Chas Robertson (owner/builder) helped many migrants. They were dinki-di Aussies and advanced my parents' English-speaking skills in addition to what Mum and Dad were picking up listening to an ABC Radio program that on various nights had Polish and German language programs with English explanations. They were building brick foundations for their house in 1951 and I was sitting in the wheelbarrow watching them. This was the day Mr Robertson told me to barrack for the Essendon Bombers. Directly behind me in the photo on the horizon is the present Station Road / Ballarat Road, Deer Park intersection. The paddocks behind are now the fully built up Cairnlea. Furlong Road runs east-west in the distant horizon behind us.



Bernie Kokot supervising construction, 3 Pennell Ave, 1951.

I recall the old grey Commer Van doing the street rounds selling flagons of wine, specifically white varietals Hock and Sauterne. My father, as nearly all migrant kids' dads did, bought a flagon of each on the Saturday, most of which with help of a few neighbours was consumed by Saturday night. I, as did other kids, was then sent to the chemist's shop about 10 a.m. on the Sunday morning to ask for (buy) a bottle of "medicinal wine". It was sold without question even though I found out many years later it was the potent "Invalid Brandy".

They were the days when monthly the "Bottle-O" would call to collect empties in his wooden cases. We kids mostly got the proceeds. That was our pocket money later used to go to the pictures at the Sunshine Theatre or the train fare and entry to the Middle Footscray Baths. From those mid 1950s I have my father's Victorian Railway payslips that show his weekly wage at £5/5/- (five pounds five shillings or \$10.50). It's a credit to our parents of those days that we never went hungry, always well dressed and my receiving two shillings every dad's payday as pocket money plus the two big bars of Cadbury's chocolate. As an aside, our then block of land in Scott Avenue cost 90 pounds (\$180). My father and a Ukrainian friend built our house and most migrants in similar situations are indebted to the trustworthiness of the Stevens Timber

yard in providing materials on credit, assured the cost thereof would religiously be met every “pay week”.

TV and Olympics

We are now circa 1956 when TV arrived, the Melbourne Olympic Games, parents meeting Australian friends in St Albans that had a car and opportunity for picnics etc to regions beyond St Albans.

The arrival of television in 1956 opened up more opportunities for kids from both sides of the railway line to meet. I recall when Unger’s Milk Bar put a TV on the rear shelf of their shop and at around 4 p.m. after school many kids would sit cross-legged on the shop floor watching the Mickey Mouse Show. (The early St Albans migrants were proud to accept the opportunity that Australia offered and wanted to be seen to adapt to "Australian Standards" and it wasn't long before I had my own "Mickey Mouse" tie.) Mr Unger would give us kids a free ice-cream as we sat cross-legged on the shop floor watching "The Mickey Mouse Show" on one of the first TVs in St Albans. The other TV on public view was in the window of the then Anderson’s Furniture Store in Main Road West. It was a drawcard to many passersby and prompted my parents to buy their first TV set, in particular to watch the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. My parents went to the opening ceremony attended by Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip in November and I was very proud of being one of the very few, if not the only kid in St Albans, to have a small pennant souvenir flag of the event proudly furling on the handlebars of my bicycle thereafter.

Pertinent to the arrival of television I vividly recall the anxiety my parents experienced when word got around on the grapevine (no home phones then) that inspectors from the Broadcasting Commission were doing unannounced nocturnal rounds checking whether TV set owners had a current “TV Licence”. To migrants that had not long escaped the ravages and trauma of World War II, these inspectors were reminiscent of the German Gestapo or the Communist KGB. Even though most TV sets then had indoor antennas, the surveillance equipment used for the checks could identify TV signal reception. Our house always had a current licence, but the knock on the door from an inspector was rarely a welcome visit.

If to digress a little, but on the same point of sentimentalism, I still have indelible memories of my parents being emotionally moved when in the stillness of those St Albans nights came the haunting, reminiscent wail from a distant steam locomotive’s deep-throated “whistle”. Without even reference to the photo in my parents old album of Mum, Dad and myself, then three and a half years of age standing petrified on a steam loco leaving Germany, those sounds to me were also chilling. I am sure that the sound of the then occasional 1950’s police car siren as it passed through St Albans on whatever midnight errand had similar effect on recent European migrants.

Bicycle Escapades

Back to that lighter note of bicycles: bike repairs would have taken up a lot of a young kid’s time. This was not an era of “toss it away and get a new one.” It’s anyone’s guess how often the cotter pin on the pedals slipped as one was at speed, riding “hand-and-heels” jockey style, only to land heavily on the cross-bar on that part of the anatomy between the big toes. If your bicycle was a “fixed wheeler”, chances are every pair of long pants you owned were perforated at the cuffs. Often it required extreme dexterity to lay the bike down and contort with one hand to reverse the back wheel and extract the cuffs from the greasy chain.

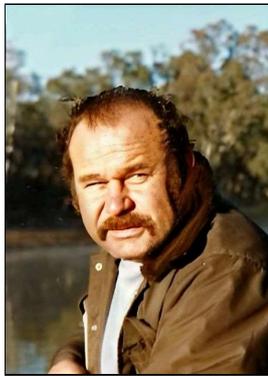
Better-off kids had bikes with the 3-speed rear wheel hub. Few parents then would not forget the tub of butter (returned to the block-ice, Coolgardie chiller) with black grease in the butter. This was always after doing a “bearing job”. The ball bearings then were individual and not the encased type. The butter was used to adhere the ball bearing into the bearing shell during reassembly. Bike chains I recall were always a constant repair and it took quite some skill to ride a bike with a chain made in sections of various, un-matching links. A “breakdown” some 6 miles

from home was a disaster. Punctured tyres were no concern, remedied by packing the flat tyre with straw grass, ripping ones shirt into strips as binding to hold the tyre onto the rim.

Mum's wooden clothes pegs were ever in short supply and father's deck of cards always lacked the full deck. Both cards and pegs were used for the whirring "motor noise" as the card rattled on the spokes of the back wheel. (Plastic sheet then barely existed.) Our inventiveness went even further by replacing the standard bull-horn handle bars with a car steering wheel. This meant you could dink two mates: One on the cross-bar, the other sitting on the steering wheel. For some reason girls' bikes were more refined and rarely had problems, but a boy would never ride a girl's bicycle for fear of being called a sissy.

Liszkiewicz's Kite

Around this time my mother, as did several other neighbour ladies, went to work at Bradford Cotton Mills in Footscray. I recall one time Mum bringing home a remnant roll of strong, rayon string. It must have been some 2 miles long: just the thing for use on kites, which were then a popular pastime, with little fear of overhead entanglement in open paddocks. (The high tension electrical pylons were only in the early stage of erection then.)



One time, with the assistance of then across-the-road teenage neighbour Henry Liszkiewicz, we constructed a monster (6 feet high) brown paper kite. It managed to get so high on that roll of string that it encroached upon the landing path of aeroplanes on the final descent to Essendon Airport. We lost visual sight of our kite (it broke away) until an Aviation Authority person located us at our Scott Avenue "launch site" and advised us of altitude limitations for kids' kites. That is a true story. Henry came to Australia at age 13 and couldn't speak English, but he ended up studying medicine at Melbourne University and came back to St Albans to practice with Dr Balabin. We used to go camping and fishing. He was only 57 when he died of cancer on 1 February 1994. The

Dawidowicz's are kin to Dr. Henry and each year we acknowledge this in tribute in a Memorial fishing trip of which the Doc was always involved with us in the 1960s to early '90s. I was a very close friend. I also remember that Dr Henry had been a close friend of Bill Betson, who was then Senior Detective Constable at St Albans and Sunshine. What a wealth of history there is if only some of the aforementioned were still able to tell.

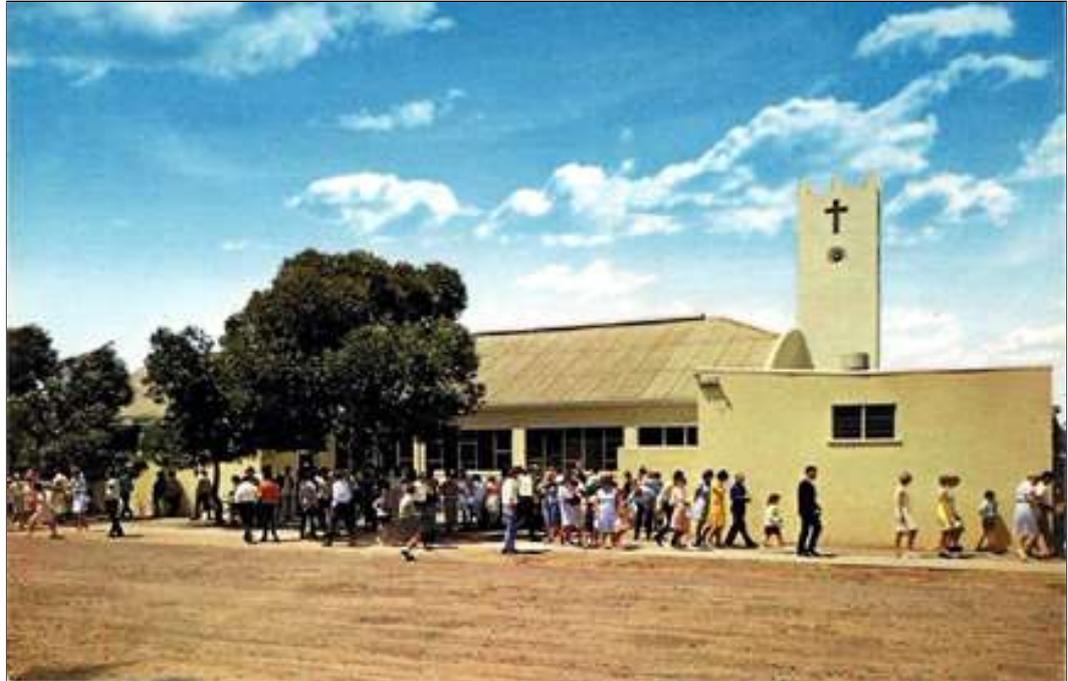
Flaunting the Law

Is anybody prepared to admit that they put pennies on the rail tracks behind where the St. Albans Hotel is now? What about jumping off the end of the platform at that end because you had no ticket? Or changing carriages at Albion to be a jump ahead of the Ticket Inspector with his ticket punch to notch out the day and time on those heavy cardboard tickets? It was never with any miss-intent, but many of us kids were chastised for placing pennies to be flattened by trains on railway tracks, scaling the supporting structure of "The Quarter Mile Bridge", trespassing around the ICI munitions bunkers, shooting rabbits with slug guns, the usual paper plugging of the coin-return in those public phones ... and the icy-pole stick trick to make free calls. However, we caused no vandalism and graffiti was unknown. (Aerosol spray cans and felt pen markers were not yet invented.) European parents' discipline was strong in those days and the authority of Police revered and respected.

The greatest extent to which we flaunted the law was finding and reusing train tickets that had not been "Expiry" punched, stealing fence-overhanging fruit and huge sunflowers and sneaking under the canvas into Ashton Circus or Carnival that were regular events in St Albans. A couple of vagabond mates I still know confess to stealing empty lemonade bottles from the back of their local Milk Bar, only to get sprung 15 minutes later trying to cash them in at the same shop for the deposit ... probably to buy a then packet of 10 cigarettes!

Sacred Heart School

At around age of 12 we met many new friends when attending Sunday Mass at Sacred Heart Church to us boys was more of a social gathering rather than religious enlightenment. We were always fearful of the yearly home visit by the Parish Priest lest there be a discreet report to parents of our juvenescent “activities”. I always received a clean slate as my father made a good donation to the visiting reverend, both monetary and “in kind”, over a few glasses of wine during the padre's visit.



Sacred Heart Church, Winifred Street St Albans, 1950s.



Sacred Heart Church, Winifred Street St Albans, late 1960s.

My memories of Sacred Heart Catholic School (1957 and 1958) are scant apart from the time my mate Mick and I brought live snakes to school for presentation as “nature study”. The nuns immediately made us put the snakes into the incinerator. Mick and I however were praised for our enthusiasm and despite other misdemeanours were never reprimanded. Our ploy was to bring the nuns regular bunches of flowers. It was amazing how large the bouquets were from the time we grabbed many bunches from people’s front yards on our long walk to school! I still don’t know why many of the kids feared Catholic school discipline.

There was never a greater fear however than the week before Christmas when, after dark, young kids heard the clamour of a big, loud bell on their doorstep when a rotund Polish gentleman dressed as Santa would do the rounds to those parents whom he knew. I generally had to be coaxed into the lounge room but soon found ease when glasses of Vodka and many Na Zdrowie (“Good Health”) salutations were made. I soon realised that Santa was human after all!

Boxing Day for us usually meant a drive and picnic to some cool location as respite from December’s heat. Our Aussie neighbour had a huge 1948 Chevrolet Wagon and the outing for the day would be to Lake Wendouree in Ballarat, Moorabool Reservoir, or to Daylesford. The other memorable occasions for us kids then were the Polish / German Community organised bus trips to similar locations. In particular were the winter excursions for forest mushroom gathering to Bostock Reservoir and Mt. Macedon. Those outings certainly bonded many new adult friendships and cemented a young person's group of friends as well.

It was opportune that those places were beside lakes for us kids to go fishing during the picnic festivities. Many of us developed our angling skills there. There was no stronger bond between boys than fishing. We seemingly inherited some craft skills from our fathers' utilitarian days when they were still in Europe in us making our own fishing rods from bamboo sticks. The change came I remember when Coles opened in St Albans and a proper split cane rod and spinning reel combo cost 10 shillings. No fish in the Maribyrnong River or Jacksons Creek around Keilor was safe! The same pastimes were joyfully had catching eels and ferreting for rabbits in Kororoit Creek now choked by the residential expansion northward of Caroline Springs. Yes, they were the days.

St Albans High School



FORM 2C
Front Row: Helen Eisner, Vivien Hughes, Karola Marklein, Hilary Smith, Rosemary Kiss, Elizabeth Sweveges. **Second Row:** Carla Van Leeuwen, Jennifer McKay, Sylvia Sierajewski, Stanislaw Szwestek, Carol Dusting, Anna Halila. **Third Row:** Joerk Dasler, Les Cameron, Peter Tucker, Wladislaw Antonowicz, Waclaw Borowski, Wladimir Grishin, Per Becker, Franz Richardts. **Back Row:** Peter Thurgood, Anthony Laskowski, Bernard Kokot, Jan Dworecki, Michael Chabiera, Jerry Sawzuck, Dennis Kerr, Peter Plain, Wladimir Manic.

I started at St. Albans High in 1958 at the age of twelve and the initial years were uneventful. I went through to Matriculation level with a keen aptitude for Art, Science and Geography. My parents elected to send me to a High School rather than the Sunshine Tech as mum had some great aspirations of me becoming a Doctor. We then had no choice in electing what subjects we preferred. I had practical talents in woodworking, artistry, a fondness of Geography and Science but at the time I despised Algebra, English History and Music. The dislike for algebra primarily stemmed from the fact that it was “too abstract” for me and totally meaningless. I think the algebra teacher then was Jack Rivett where, in typically prankish schoolboy cheek, we all gave him the name “Rivet-head”. Jack was stern and serious. To us boys he displayed little humour.

He never had any “pet” pupils and tarred all us kids with the same brush as being, pardon my colloquialism, just little disobedient buggers. None of us had any affinity with Mr. Rivett and his little beady eyes would stare you down during class as if to put the living fear of god into you if you could not comprehend an equation he had written on his blackboard. That impetuous character of Jack’s ... and the speed at which he expected pupils to grasp the intricacy of algebra led to my dislike of that subject which I failed at every exam. It’s ironic that in retrospect some many years later - with no thanks to algebra - my talents in lateral thinking and problem solving developed and benefited me throughout the whole of my later career path.

English History with Tom “Doc” Walsh was tolerated only because he encouraged us to use illustrations in our homework assignments. My talent at art was appreciated by Doc and I was always marked highly. Doc was also our sports master in those early years. Tom’s persona was a happy one and in a flashback to those days, the most poignant recollection I have of the Doc is a short, chubby man who during football games when he would normally umpire, could never keep up with the play, thus deciding that at half time, to save all him exhaustion, the football would be bounced in the centre as usual, but only half the oval used for play with both rival teams kicking to the same goals. Doc’s trademark however was his favourite pale blue hand-knitted coarse open-weave jumper with a big hole around the belly section.

Music classes were never looked forward to with our Miss Bowles. A fiery redhead, her school piano was the most sacred object. It was actually an obsession. Before touching the keys, pupils had to wash their hands in the toilets and present them to her. Lord help anyone that touched the ivories otherwise as a hefty smack over your fingers with a ruler was standard disciplinary issue. I think that woman did have some grandiose and probably frustrated ambition and never having made the grade as a concert pianist she took out her wrath on us pupils. Despite my marks in Music then always being under the 50 pass mark, in later years I became a reasonable guitarist and actually came to very much appreciate piano music.

Of similar strictness, but much less emotional, was the ginger-haired man generally respected by us lads was Ken Chilton, our woodwork teacher for the first two years. His nickname was “Chisel-head” for obvious reasons!

Ken liked me and my friend Michael Chabiera as, with any given woodwork project that was set for a four week’s completion, Mick and I would bowl this over well before deadline. Ken acknowledged our skill and in that extra time we had gained, both Mick and I were given extra timber and free reign to make things of our own choosing. In the end, Mick and I made reasonable scale models: Mine a WW II “Hawker Hurricane” and Mick’s being a “Spitfire”. We donated those to “Mr. Chisel-head” and our end-of-year marks I recall were somewhere at 92% pass rate.

“Art” was always a favourite subject and our teacher then was Laurie Burchell. He initially wasn’t a bad sort of a bloke but had the mannerism of “hissing” through the corner of his mouth at times when he showed disdain. Our nick-name for him was “Mr. Snakey”. I and then fellow mate Anthony “Ant” Laskowski were the top artists in the class and, as with woodwork, we would finish our assignments well before deadline. While Mr. Burchell was out of the room, Ant and I would “sneak-a-peak” at Burchell’s folder on his teacher’s desk, noting the next Art homework assignment. We would produce this at home in the next few days, a week well in advance of other students’ presentation thinking this would give me and Ant some recognition for incentive and foresight. This however was not to Mr. Burchell’s satisfaction and we copped heaps from then on after.

It was evident that Mr. Snakey had a vindictive streak towards me and the Ant. On a morning occasion of our Form’s school excursion to the Melbourne Art Gallery, Burchell allowed me and Ant to walk with the rest of the class from the St. Albans High School to board the train at the St. Albans Station, and at last minute he told us we were not going. We were told to go back to class. The Ant and I instead went fishing to the Maribyrnong River at Green Gully, five miles

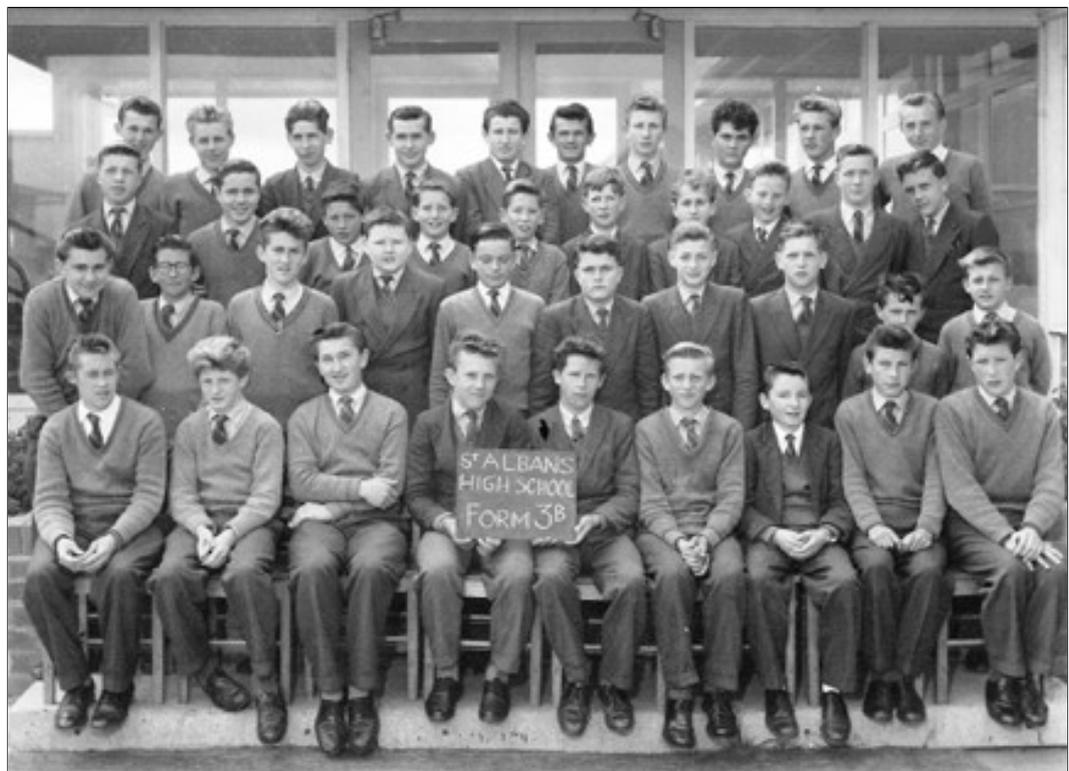
away on our bicycles. Burchell sprung us there later that arvo and let down our bicycle tyres just for good measure.

Burchell was also the teacher that used all sleuth and cunning to nab boys smoking behind the shelter shed in the school grounds. In our eyes, that blotted his copybook more, and the more he exercised his omnipotence the more difficult we made his job as a teacher.

A friend some years older said he had seen Laurie Burchell at a Jazz Joint in Melbourne dressed in the vogue of those days in corduroy trousers, suede desert boots and duffle coat. I later did a painting as an Art Homework exercise depicting Laurie in the company of two "Jazz-type" ladies. Laurie really liked that work which I donated to him. In the following year in his classes I never had any further hassles with him. It seems art speaks all languages.

French classes were rarely looked forward to with George Strauss. He too was very strict and rather impatient when we could not immediately repeat the French phrases he conveyed. It was easy for George to speak French in the correct tone because he had a huge nose designed for the job, and we pupils were at the young age where our voices were still soprano. I persisted however and found that in future years that developing some comprehension in French, combined then with my ability to fluently speak Polish and rudimentary German, I impressed my later girlfriends and their Aussie parents. The sixties was still an era where European migrants were considered to have no class.

Associated to that "class distinction" many of us then 14 years and going to nearby dances (Sunshine and Footscray) had this deep down stigma of admitting to any Aussie girls we met that we lived in St. Albans. That was then a real black mark in the eyes of those from more affluent suburbs. I guess that changed in later years as the term "multicultural" became accepted and we lost the conspicuousness of our "wog" identities.



I am not sure of the specific dates, but I do recall a period that may have been Form 3 at St. Albans, that a class room of us students went by bus to a brown brick, long established old school in Kingsville/Yarraville for a few months. I recall the bus operators as J. T. Manalack, a well-established name in Footscray. The bus company's sign was well displayed along their depot brick wall facing the train line just after the Middle Footscray railway station, which was then the jump off point off when we kids went to the Middle Footscray baths before Sunshine swimming pool was built. One lunchtime at that interim Kingsville school, adventurous me,

walked out of the school yard, took a couple of street turns and got lost in that unfamiliar locale - I remember a railway crossing - and I was some hours later "found" by our then teacher, he doing a headcount for the bus trip back to St. Albans. I cannot identify that school. Maybe this part-time transfer of our class to Kingsville had something to do with the new wing extensions to the St. Albans High in compensation to alleviate the classroom overload?

Motor Bikes

Around Form 4 we were 16 years of age and in the urge to show "maturity". Several of us bought second hand, cheap motor cycles, unregistered of course, and we were unlicensed. Those cycles however were now the natural transition from bicycles and an interim to getting one's first car. There was a period where we rode these motor cycles to high school, parking them along the wire fence of the east school boundary before the present Grantham Green housing development existed.

This was tolerated by the school management as we did no hooning on the school grounds and I recall two male teachers that actually took interest in our cycles as we gathered around them during our lunch breaks, without starting up the cycles, nor riding.

Riding motorcycles to school however was short lived where one owner overstepped the liberty and in school uniform lairized on his cycle in The Arcade, Main Road East. Word filtered through to school and that was that. The Arcade then in the eyes of many did not have a very good reputation. The sixties were the era of "Bodgies and Widgies" and St. Albans had a strong element. At the time however this identity was not associated with crime, but more so rivalry between St. Albans and Sunshine adolescent males.

The Arcade

I recall a shop in that dingy Arcade which was a hang-out for older teenagers and I remember these "Bodgies" hanging around with the likes of George Szwadiak, Socrates, Robert Punicki, Victor Brooks et al. It had one of the first, large Espresso coffee machines, rudimentary tables and from memory a pool table. I distinctly remember it also having one of those "table soccer" games where on an odd occasion a friend and I would play a game, although when the "hoods" arrived it was an uncomfortable place to be. The TAB was also in that area and my father used to place and collect bets there with further advice to me that from observation of the element in that locale I was sternly advised not to frequent, which I duly heeded.

We were already well "hooked" otherwise with fishing. The few months of ownership of our motor cycles gave us an opportunity to learn basic motor mechanics that were advantageous as we got our first cars, mine being a 1956 FJ Holden.

It wasn't the coppers that made us dispose of our motor cycles, but our parents for fear either of accident but more so concern that we would get involved with the wrong element. I must admit that the feeling of "freedom" one had on motorcycle in those days was the ultimate "escape" from the then disciplines of schooling, strict parental guidance and the stresses and emotions most teenagers go through.

The Law in Action

In those early sixties we saw the posting of Constable Terry Mangles to the St. Albans Police Station (now the Funeral Parlour site). Constable Mangles was relatively young and from memory came from a country town. I can recall when he and another constable would regularly "pounce" on the Arcade and at times find the hoods had fled through the back exit. Regardless, they were aware of names and diligently pursued those in question.

Illustrative of police determination to show the hoods who was boss, I recall one day them visiting the home of a male wanted for some motoring offence. The remedy there was not to

issue a summons. One of the constables got in the offenders' vehicle and using burly legs and strong feet physically bent sideways both that car's brake and clutch pedal making those controls inoperative.

Detective Bill Betson was head of that force in St. Albans at that time. Bill was very much respected by all for his very gentlemanly manner but always with thoroughness. There were a few youngsters like us that, for what was a minor misdemeanour, were taught to respect the law if not instill a fear to go further astray. It was customary to be taken to the then Sunshine Police Station and Courthouse and be sat in the foyer, no further ado, and later told to get home and tell one's parents of the event. Quite often the Police would make a later casual call to a home to check with parents if "the boy" had told them of their short term apprehension.

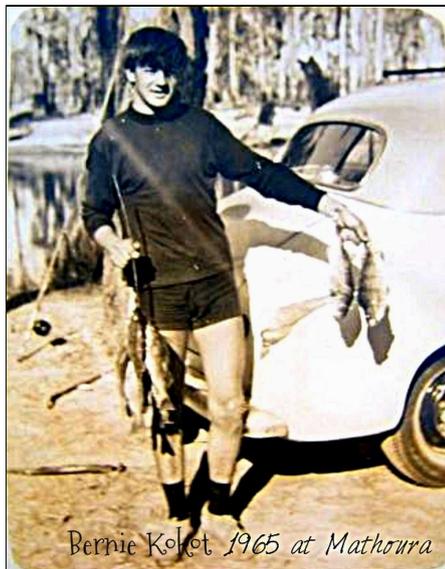
I never really got into any police trouble except once, when I was about 14 years and an old a mate and I were questioned walking down the street like "big nobs" lighting up one cigarette after another, having a few puffs, then throwing the near-intact ciggie away. We admitted (in truth) that we had found some 30 packets of "Turf Cork Tipped" cigarettes stashed under a boxthorn bush on the site of the present St. Albans Hotel. Later, a youthful gang on "the other side of the tracks" was found to have broken into an Arcade shop to steal them.

Graduation

Recollections of my last two years at St. Albans High are fairly uneventful. I left at end of year in 1963 and on 4th February 1964, six weeks before my eighteenth birthday, I got my first job as a Despatch Clerk with Containers Limited Packaging in West Footscray. It might now be seen in retrospect and credit that it was the schooling during those years at St. Albans High where on application for that job at Containers Ltd I was the first applicant and hired immediately.

As the School's motto was "Truth Is Our Light" there has never been a dark memory of those school days.

Postscript



I think I have exhausted most of what was on my memorabilia photo files. There's a missing chapter in the era of the mid 1960s of the Mathoura days. Those photos were lost in my relocation from St Albans to Howlong, now 15 years ago. There are some fond memories however of roo and rabbit shooting ... and fishing at Boundary Bend, at the junction of the Gulpa Creek, thereabouts where the Edward River meets the Murray ... and camps opposite Cutty (John) Dougherty's shack on the Victorian side of the Murray. Brundelski will remember the morning after a cool night lifting the bonnet of his then white Holden to check oil and water prior to a day's shoot, with a big red-bellied black snake coiled on the warm motor. There of course were those memorable moments of those late afternoon, thirst quenching session, progressing in stages through all three of the pubs in Mathoura, from the

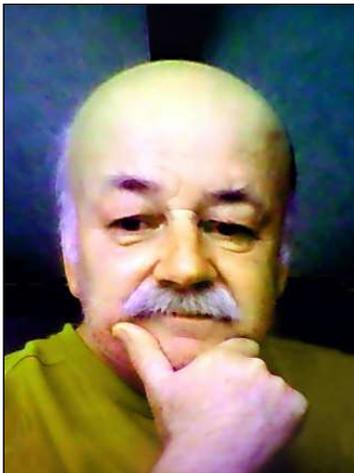
bottom pub, middle pub then the top pub. In 1962, Wishi, Jeff, myself and Stepas Launikonis started a beer drinkers' club in St Albans called the "Alkes-Stevo" Club. The 'stevo' was conceived by Stepas, in apparent glorification as a diminutive of his (Stepas) name. I made each of us a white T-shirt, on the back in then texta-pen I drew a large bottle top with the wording "Sponsored by Carlton & United Breweries". I remember some local drinkers in a Mathoura pub offering to buy the shirts from us for then 10 Pounds each!!! Silly us didn't sell. I was silly that I didn't continue producing printed T-shirts as that concept was then totally new. I could have now been a Millionaire! Only on photo here of that camping spot. It's 1965 when Max Heidinger and I did a trip. We spun up 15 redfin in 10 minutes using "Hog-back" spinners.

David Miller is Wishy Dawidowicz's brother-in-law. David married Wishy's sister, then Halina Dawidowicz, who with Wishy, lived in Scott Avenue, St Albans, next door to Dr. Henry. Through that affiliation with Wishy, David befriended Dr. Henry and with Jeff Brundel, they were a threesome that would go hunting and fishing, and while I still lived in Melbourne until moving to Sydney in 1975, I was the fourth member of this group. The group was called "Miller's Guerrilla's" as David was an Engineer in the Australian Army. He started as head of RAEME at the Bandiana Barracks (across the road from Bonegilla) in the mid 1960s. He served in Vietnam in the Engineers corps and as a Lieutenant-Colonel circa 1976 went to Schriivenham Officers College (England) to gain his Masters Degree in Weapons and Ballistics.

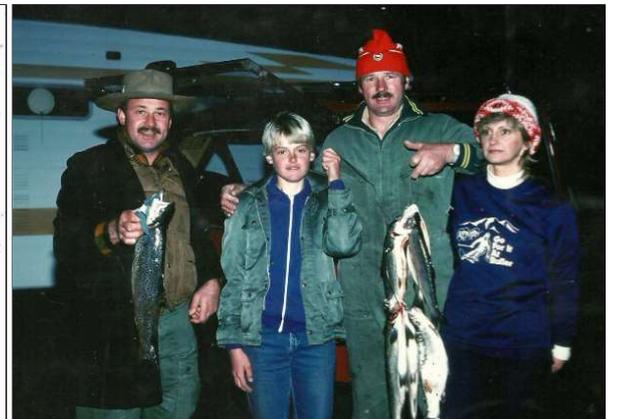
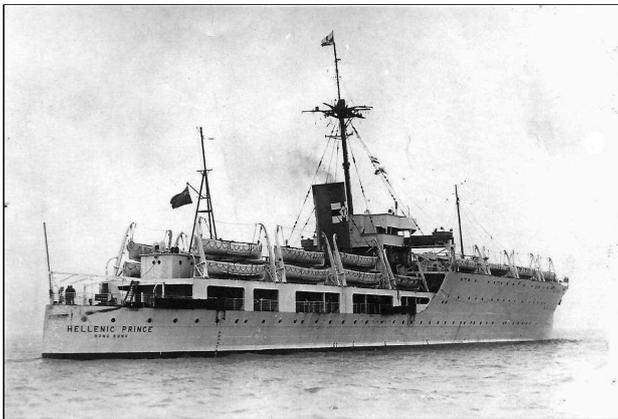
From circa late 1990s, David then divorced from Halina and marrying Beverly, moved from Canberra to Howlong where David set up his home business as a Consultant to the Russian Space Agency in the conversion of post arms race Russian Military rockets to Ruski satellite launching. He did similar for the Brazilian Government in the 2005+ years and shortly thereafter similar "discussions" with the Turkish Ambassador. David hence to all and sundry is referred to as "The Rocket Scientist".

By marriage to Halina, David had two children, both now in their early 40s. Michelle in the 1990's was the first female commander of the warship HMAS Melbourne then on active patrols in the Timor Sea. Michelle some years ago in Canberra married husband Mark, who was an ace RAAF pilot. They both still live in Canberra and now have Senior postings in Navy and RAAF diplomacies. Andrew (Drew) Miller has a doctorate in Human Physiology and a senior lecturer at a Newcastle NSW university. His profile is expansive on LinkedIn and associated Sports Training/ Development websites.

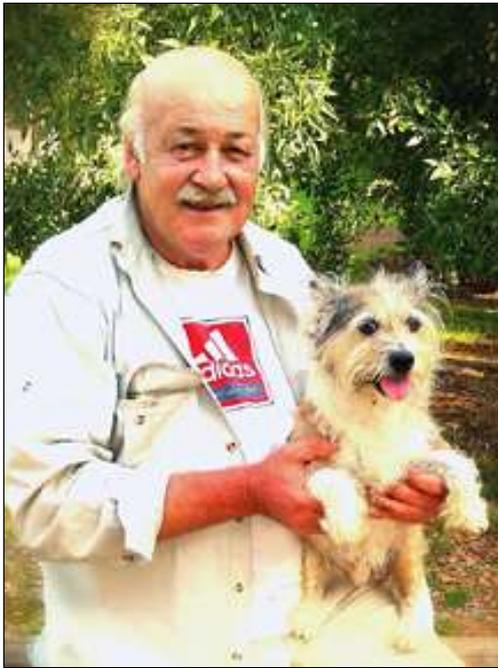
Jeff Brundel leaving school in St Alban's worked in a qualified mechanical capacity and graduated to the field of cranes and heavy lifting equipment. Jeff for several years has been the President of Australia "Crane Safe". There is plenty of info on the web. I mentioned in past references that Jeff married Barbara Lubicz. Jeff and Barbara live near me in Howlong. Andy Lubicz lives on a farmlet in Beechworth. I must catch up with him shortly.



Bernie Kokot, 8 March 2016.



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School photographs courtesy of Nick Szwed.