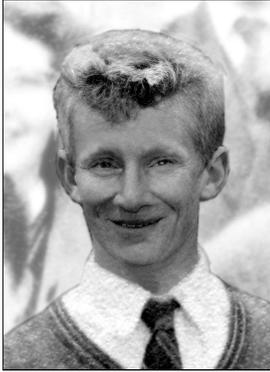


STEVE KOZLOWSKI: STUDENT 1957 - 1960



I was born in January 1944 during the war somewhere in Poland. When I asked my mother where I was born she said I was born in the forest. I said surely there was a house or hospital or something. She said no, I was born in a forest.

It was during the war and every day was a struggle for survival. One day they lost me and nearly lost me permanently. They had me wrapped up in an old army coat and were running through the snow. They stopped for a breather and opened up the coat to discover there was no baby. So my father ran back and found me in the snow looking quite blue. But I survived.

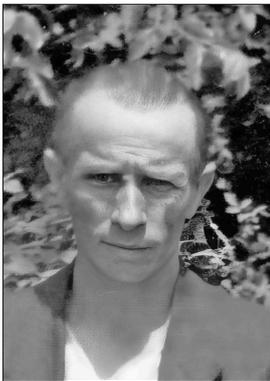
My mother was from Warsaw and I think my father was from Lwow. How they met I have no idea, but people do travel.



Mum spoke about some incidents in the war, but only reluctantly, because terrible things had happened and sometimes people want to forget. She told me that we were on the displaced persons' train with hundreds of people and traveling for long periods up and down the tracks between destinations and the people were dropping like rabbits. I think the German army authorities were hoping the people would die during the journey. Whenever they stopped they would lay the dead bodies alongside the tracks and move on again.

At one stop my mother jumped off the train and headed for a puddle of water because there was no water on the train. The German officer demanded to know what she was doing and she replied she was getting water for her family. He said if you go near that I will shoot you. She turned around and said shoot me. She was lucky, because he turned his back and walked away.

Another time they were told to walk through the countryside. My father and his brother said they would walk ahead to see where they were going. They were heading towards Treblinka. Some 750,000 people were murdered there.



My father always said that to survive you had to have something to barter and the best thing was tobacco, so he hoarded tobacco and would hide it under his coat and trade it for other things.

One day the Germans were looking for some partisans and grilled him if he had seen any. He gave some wrong directions in his broken German and got away with it because the soldiers headed off. He survived. What we heard too was that when the parents were put into the labour camps the children were separated from them. There were not many kids. One of the stories was that they were feeding the kids a lot of Saccharine and many of them died as a consequence.

In 1946 we were in a displaced persons camp in Leiningen in the American-controlled part of Germany. I'm not sure how we got there but I presume that my parents were fleeing from the Soviet occupation of Poland. We must have been there some time because our earliest family photographs are from this location.



Kozlowski family at Leiningen camp 1940s (c) Steve Kozlowski.

As with many displaced families after the war, we were sent to refugee camps. After Leiningen we were moved to Italy and came to Australia on the USS General Stewart, which had been one of the American troop carriers. We had become part of the great Diaspora of the International Refugee Organisation's post-war resettlement program. We came to Australia in 1950 and we spent about two-and-a-half years in the Bathurst migrant camp in New South Wales. From there we ended up at Rushworth between Bendigo and Shepparton but I can't remember how long we stayed there.



Kozlowski family at Leiningen camp 1940s (c) Steve Kozlowski.

We came to St Albans mid 1952 because I was enrolled at St Albans Primary School in June 1952 and I have a photo of me in Grade 3A in 1953. We would walk from Cowper Avenue to the school five days per week. It was a good walk. We formed a walking bus, starting with my sister and I at our place and picking up two or three extra pupils at points as we walked along, until finally there were about thirty of us. On the way back it was the reverse and the number diminished as kids dropped out on reaching their home. It was good. You saw people from your neighbourhood and many of them are still around. One of the fellows was Harry Moakes who started the Green Gully soccer club, but at that time it was called Ajax. Harry was from Malta and came here in the mid 1950s and became involved with soccer very quickly. He's still here and turned 89 not long ago. He was the President of the St Albans pensioner club that I help run in the new Errington Community Centre. He retired recently and they elected me as his replacement.

I had two sisters, Anna and Teresa, and they are still around. Anna was born in 1942 and Teresa was born in 1946, whereas I was born in 1944, so I split the difference. I was born in Stanislawow in Poland. There are several towns named Stanislawow in modern Poland with one east of Warsaw. Mother used to say it was somewhere near the big river Bug. It might be the town east of Warsaw but other people say it could be the old pre-war province or town near Lwow which was once part of Poland but is now in the Ukraine.

I'm not sure why we moved to St Albans. It might have been through a first cousin who was here before us. I think my father bought a block of land from Frank Mann who was a local real estate agent. I think my uncle got my father to come from Rushworth to look at this block of land in St Albans. We got off at the Albion station and walked around looking for this block of land that they had no idea where it was located. It was getting dark and where we slept I don't know, but it might have been a car crate.



Car crate used as a shed 1950s (c) Steve Kozlowski.

Anyway, the block was in Cowper Avenue in St Albans. My father got a job at Wunderlichs in Albion and worked there all his life there. As with all the European migrants, you saved your money and bought a bit of timber and when you had enough timber you put up a wall frame. Then you saved some more money and did it again. When the weekend came everyone was helping each building their homes. One had to put up the wall frame, another had to do something else. They helped each other. That's the way it worked.

When we first came to Cowper Avenue the house was probably two rooms and that was built by my father and other people. My parents slept in one room and we kids slept in the other. Eventually another room was built so the boys and girls would have separate bedrooms. Then more was added and it became a full house. I think the whole house took less than a year to build. When the frame was up the first thing they did was put a branch of a tree up on the top of the roof. That was a tradition. I could never find out why that was a tradition of the Europeans.



Houses in Cowper Ave 1950s (c) Sylvia Bluemel

Migrants came because they were looking for land and a new country to live in. My mother befriended a fellow and she eventually found out that he had been in the German army. He was reluctant to talk of his war experiences but eventually opened up. My mum was born in Warsaw and his unit went into Warsaw to do what they had to do. Well, she let him have it. She laid into him. After that when he saw her he'd cross over the street. He might not have done anything himself but he was part of an army that did.

In the early years of St Albans no one would pinch anything. You could leave things outside the house or outside the shops and they would not go missing. Then we heard one time that a shop had left part of an aluminium door outside and that disappeared. That was the first time that someone pinched something from them. Occasionally a bicycle was stolen from the railway station but more so the wheels, because if you had a puncture it was easier to take the wheel than the bike. It wasn't good.

We didn't start off with a bungalow because dad build a square building. I'm not sure who he stayed with when he started building but there was an old wooden car crate in our back yard that we used as a shed so perhaps that was dad's first sleepout in St Albans. One started off with one or two rooms and that's where we slept while the rest of the house was being built. I didn't think of it as a bungalow because bungalows were three rooms longwise. I don't know how people lived in them. The toilets were always outside and the dunny man would come once a week. How many times the poor guy was followed by dogs who wanted to attack him. It was not an easy job.

Our little neighborhood was the area between Cowper, Bernbank and Manfred streets. We were a very multicultural neighbourhood with people of several nationalities. In our area we had Dutch, Russian, Ukrainians, there were Polish off course, a couple of English and there were the German people; the Italians came bit later. Sylvia Kopmann was German; she was a good speaker and very polite in her language. She lived in Manfred Avenue opposite Johnny Oldaker who was of British background. We called him Turk because of his swarthy complexion even though he was English; his parents were Josephine and Thomas.

Turk came here with his parents when he was young. When he was 15 or 16 his mum took him back to England. Fifteen years later there was a knock on my door and it was Turk looking for me. I was surprised that he knew where I was. He said he went to the local police station and asked them. Turk had married quite young but in those years if you were under a certain age the marriages were not recognised overseas. Turk and his young wife became separated when he went overseas and he wanted to meet her again. I was able to trace her to Mt Gambier and when he returned a second time he went there to visit her. Turk now lives in Leicester in England with two children and I am still in touch with him.

The streets were unmade. The gutter was just a ditch along the road. Kenny Hovenga was a young Dutch immigrant with several sisters. One time he wanted a dink on my bike and I pedalled while he was perched on my handlebars playing with a yo yo. One of our friends who had a car drove towards us so the bike swerved and Kenny fell off into this filthy gutter. He was laying there and got up still holding onto his yo yo. When the fireworks came the gutters were a temptation. The kids would be looking at the yucky, greeny, crawly stuff in the gutter and someone would quickly drop a cracker into it and kaboom ... greeny slime everywhere.

As I said, the roads were unmade. When it rained it was mud. When it was hot it was hot. We didn't have fans, we covered the windows and accepted it. We managed. There were a couple of dams in the paddocks. Sometimes the whole family might be sitting around one of these dams, but if you went in for a swim you would go in clean and come out a covered in a film of grey clay. There was a dam near where we lived – it's now a playground. There was a swimming hole at the river at the end of Biggs Street. Once we discovered that there was a river nearby it became a meeting place for most of St Albans. Some of the swimmers were reckless because they would jump in without checking for hazards and come out with a split head. We were careful. We learnt to swim in that river and knew where the rocks and stumps were. We'd tell people where the hazards were but some would just jump off the tree without looking.

At the end of Biggs Street before the path down to the river there was Sunshine Avenue. Down where the power station is now located there was a little waterfall surrounded with boxthorns. You could sit along the top there and watch all the snakes, lizards and rabbits. Boxthorn bushes and Scotch thistles used to be along Green Gully Road and if you went off the road you probably ran into the boxthorns. That was a dangerous road going down into that gulley because if your brakes weren't good you couldn't manoeuvre round the steep curves. Lots of cars and bicycle ran off the road along there and a number of people died. Young Johnny Kasjan from the high school was killed there in 1961 by a hit and run driver.



A Dutch man by the name of Henricus Van der Kruys drowned at the Biggs Street swimming hole. They lived in Main Road East around the corner for us. At that time the river was in flood and a young family friend got into trouble so he dived in to rescue her. The girl was saved but Van der Kruys drowned. The police couldn't do much because of the turbulence of the water and nothing could be done until the river subsided. They found his body two weeks later near the quarter mile bridge. They were a good family. Mrs Van der Kruys was left with 8 kids under 14 years of age to raise on her own. The community rallied some support and she went to live in a housing commission place in Braybrook. I think the daughter later received an award from Prime Minister Bob Menzies.

My parents had a veggie garden and grew what they could to sustain themselves and there was the occasional fruit tree. Most people had something in the ground and shared what they had. If the neighbours' kids were around when tea was served they also got a plate. What people had was shared. Sometimes when the evenings came and it was nice and clear one of the neighbours played the banjo and that music went right across the paddocks. You could hear it a kilometre up the road.

Bonfires were very popular. Between the Oldaker and the Crossland families there were about five vacant blocks and when bonfire night came everybody brought everything out – old furniture, you name it, was put on the bonfire. All the families would come out and it was an outing for the night. They'd take out their chairs and sit back. The Dutch people would be playing their banjos. The kids would be cheering, the fires would be going, and someone would be dancing. That's the way it was. It was the same in Albion; they had a bonfire near the silos many years ago and that was huge. People would come from all around to enjoy the spectacle. Now people complain about pollution.

Wasył Kewniuk was a Russian neighbour. He was a tank commander in the war and drove trucks. They had no children. He had a couple of friends who were killed at the Furlong Road railway crossing on their motor bike when they ran into a train. One of them was an adopted brother. We went to the funeral. Wasył had a tray truck and we put armchairs in the back of this truck and we all sat there because that's the only transport we had to get to the Melbourne General Cemetery for the funeral. You couldn't do it now, you would be arrested.

Another Dutch fella had been in the Dutch army – Harry Coort – who had a shop in Main Road West. He lived at the top of our street in Main Road East. His wife was Maria and he was Arie but we all knew him as Harry. He was an auto electrician and his shop was near Kerr the Chemist on the south side of Main Road West. He eventually moved to Goughs Bay near Mansfield. He's the one who taught me how to shoot. He'd been in the army and had a rifle.

Where we were there, there was nothing between us and the river. There was Cowper Avenue and then it was all empty up to Sunshine Avenue and further to the river. That used to be a dirt track. You wouldn't go there because if you got bogged or broke down no-one would go near the place. There was a stone fence there and we would shoot into that. People used guns to shoot rabbits for their dinner but I didn't want to do that so I did a bit of target practice. Coort was very safety conscious with guns. One day someone gave me an air pistol and I fired it near some people. He came up and gave me a thick ear and said never to do it again.



There was another Dutch family by the name of Elzinga with three children, who also came here from the Bathurst camp and lived in Cowper Street not far from us. He was a house painter and later managed a paint shop in Main Road East opposite the Tin Shed. They were Fonger and Sjouke but here they were known as Fred and Jill. Fred was involved with the Presbyterian church in East Esplanade. Jill worked as a cleaner and when she was working at 3AW they couldn't pronounce her Dutch name so they called her Jill. Mr Elzinga died in the early 1970s and I remember that their daughter Annie died of cancer in the 1990s at a fairly young age, in her early fifties.

Mr and Mrs Epema were another local Dutch family; they later moved to Braybrook. Their son loved horses. We went to visit Mrs Epema years later and she looked at me and said "You're the one I used to chase with a broom." She was laughing her head off. We sat and talked for hours.



Kenny Hovenga had a brother Richard who the oldest of the kids. The family was from the Netherlands and like us they arrived at Sydney and went to the Bathurst Reception Centre before moving to Rushworth and then Cowper Street, St Albans. Kenny had at least three sisters and they were Wentje, Ytje and Tryntje – who went to the high school and they still come to class reunions. Richard joined the Salvation Army and learnt how to play the clarinet. A couple of times he came late at night to my place and we'd go out about midnight, him with his clarinet, me with a guitar, and another chap. We would go to someone's house about one o'clock in the morning and start playing outside their window. Pretty soon a head would pop out and "Get home you little ... or I'll tell your mother." The thing was that telling your father was not a problem so much, but when they said they would tell your mother you were scared.

The Van der Kruys family were the musical mob playing banjos and that.

Towards Sylvia Kopmann's place there was an English man whom we called Turk. The mother was a very jovial person but it was bit hard to understand her at times because in England they also had different dialects and hers was a broad accent. That's where we learnt how to drive a car because Turk's father bought a little Morris Minor. Sometimes when the father was at work we would take the car out for a spin. Sometimes Mr Oldaker would take us for a run in the car and we would watch how he drove. So we were self taught. When he wasn't home we would take the car and practice by driving around the block.

Down the road were the Crossland family – Annie and John. They were English and used to love drinking. They went to the pub one time and befriended somebody, a chap they called Uncle Charlie. He lived at their place for years and years. He was skinny as a rake. One day their bungalow caught on fire and I think he must have been smoking in bed. On that day Charlie disappeared and we never saw him again. The bungalow was damaged but not destroyed and Uncle Charlie was never seen again. They had a horse. Their bungalow was made of cement sheeting and one time they were backing the horse near the wall and it kicked

a hole in the cement sheeting. That hole was there for a while because no one had the money to buy things immediately.

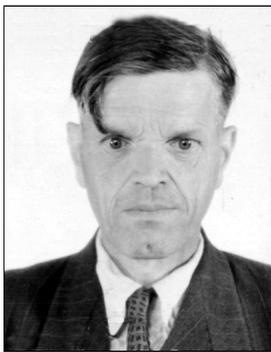


There was a mob called Kinatz in Manfred Avenue who were Ukrainian and came to St Albans in the early 1950s. The parents (Herman and Maria) worked as cleaners. Their children were Yaroslav, Ana and Bogdan. They were a good family but the father was very, very strict. The son Bogdan grew up also with a very strict temperament. He was with our group and if someone spoke harshly towards him he would want to confront them. I always tried to calm him down. The father was a solid bloke and I think he had experienced a tough life in the army.



We had Broderick Smith in our neighbourhood. His family came here a bit later from England, probably about 1960, and their first home here was a small shed at the back of a Yugoslav family before they built their own bungalow. He became a blues musician and has played in some well-known Aussie bands. These days he's playing Australian country rock. I caught up with him at one of the high school reunions and he asked me what I was doing there. I said I was on the organizing committee and he was most surprised. Broderick was a good friend of Laurie Schwab, another of our neighbours, if I recall correctly.

Another German family was the Goettlichers. The youngest boy is still around and living not far from here in Deer Park. We still see him around. There were two brothers with good physiques so they would prance around.



Petro and Barbara Kewniuk were in Bernbank Avenue – his so-called adopted brother (Wasil Motuk?) got killed in the motorbike accident with the train at Furlong Road. They used to have the old 78 records. One day we decided to have some fun with the air guns, so we hung some of the records on the washing line and used them for target practice.

Kenny Flatt was an Aussie. His father was in the army and had a 303 rifle.

I enrolled in the old St Albans primary school in 1952 with my older sister Anna. In 1954 I was bussed to Deer Park because the old school was overcrowded. The Deer Park school was a brick building and later they added a portable classroom. They had an open fireplace in the main room and I remember Kenny Hovenga was nominated as the fire officer so he had to get the firewood. What we loved is when we had to miss classes. There was an old bridge there over the Kororoit Creek and when the river flooded that bridge was under water. The bus would collect us at the St Albans school and go down Main Road and Station Road which was a single lane then. When the bridge was flooded the bus had to go back through Albion and along Ballarat Road through the back way, so that was a couple of hours gone.



Grade 3A St Albans Primary 1953

I remember years later talking with a woman at a class reunion at that school. The lady said that the school had finally convinced the Education Department to give them a portable to cope with their increased attendance. When it finally arrived and was set up suddenly there was a busload of strange kids arriving and that was us from St Albans. We were there for a couple of years until St Albans East Primary was built. We had a good chat about that.

I always wondered if the Education Department couldn't cope with us because we were foreigners. Sometimes we were roughed up a bit by the Aussie kids, but we rethought, regrouped and retaliated. After that we became good friends.



Grade 4B at Deer Park 1954.

I was at the Deer Park school in 1954 and 1955. After that I went to the new St Albans East primary school because that started up in 1956. I remember one teacher Miss or Mrs Sullivan who must have been there in 1956 because the Olympic games were on. She took us to her place during school hours to watch some of the Olympic games on her black and white television. The school used us first students as slave labour to set up the classrooms. That wasn't fair but we enjoyed it.



St Albans High School 1957.

I started at the St Albans High School in 1957. The high school opened in 1956 in Sunshine in an old church hall and then trans-ferred to the new school building in Main Road East, St Albans, in the following year. We had students from the catholic school join us state school kids, and there also some students from Sunshine, Deer Park, Sydenham, Riddells Creek and Sunbury. They all came by bus or train because no one had cars in those years.

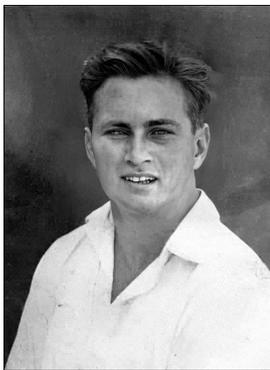


Form 4 St Albans High School.



Vanda Viti and Basil Listopad were in the first intake of St Albans High School students in 1956 when it opened in Sunshine. Vanda was from Italy and Basil was from the Ukraine. Vanda's family moved from Bonegilla to the Broadmeadows Migrant Hostel before coming to St Albans. She was one of the first students at St Albans High when it started in 1956. Vanda became a teacher and worked at the old St Albans State School for a while. I caught up with her at several of the high school reunions, but she's now passed way.

I caught up with Basil in Queensland after tracking him down and heard he was in Nambor. When I saw him walking down the street I recognised him by his gait. We started talking and had a good time sharing memories.

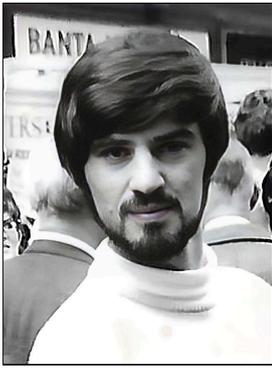


Harry Moakes started off the Ajax Soccer Club by getting a group of kids together. Their ground was the one between Vincent and Oberon avenues near Biggs Street. When I joined the pensioners club Harry was the president. His nephew is Charles Venes who was in my class at school and I used to tell Harry what Charlie was getting up to. So Harry would talk to Charlie who was always asking how Harry knew of these things, but Harry wouldn't tell him.

Charlie was a soccer person rather than an Aussie rules person, so when the school football sessions started Charlie would hide in the shower cubicles in the toilet block to avoid playing. One of the teachers, Doc Walsh, was aware to this ruse and would check under the door gap to see if anyone was standing behind the door. Charlie was smarter because he would hold himself up from the shower pipe and draw his legs up. This worked fine until the shower pipe broke under his weight and he was sprung. Charlie used to work after school in Foodlands near the Commonwealth bank. He would get detention which he wasn't happy with because he could lose his job. The teachers told him the solution was simple – don't play up at school. To stop him from nicking off they would lock the door, but Charlie jumped through the window. So they gave him double detention.

Doc Walsh was the sports master and organized a cross country run through the paddocks starting and finishing at the school. Eddie Hylan and I decided we were going to win so we hid a pushbike in a ditch along the way. We started with everyone else but later diverged to get the bike. I dinked Eddie and we peddled our way back to within about a block of the school and dumped the bike and ran the rest of the way. We were hailed as winners when we jogged into the schoolyard, but someone dobed us in and Doc bawled us out. When he demanded why we did it we said we thought it was a triathlon. Eddie's sister married Jimmy Patterson who became an artist and ended up in Broken Hill. I hadn't seen Eddie for 40 years and met him unexpectedly in the Lerdererg Gorge. I didn't recognise him because he had a big bushy beard but he recognised me.

I remember Julian Castagna from the high school - he was involved with the drama club. His family came from Italy and settled in Main Road West in a makeshift bungalow. I think Julian was on only child. His father was a brick layer who built their home in brick when most other people were building in



weatherboard. After high school Julian worked for ABC television in Melbourne for several years before moving to England and running his own film advertising business in London. He's now back in Australia. He was still making advertising films when he first came back, but he now runs a vineyard and winery at Beechworth. I've tried to contact him various times but he's often away on international or interstate business trips because of his expertise in the biodynamics of wine making.



Tom Tscherepko is someone else that I remember from high school. He was rather unconventional and we called him Killer Tom but I heard that others knew him as Bonegilla Tom because his father was a cook at Bonegilla camp and they lived there for years. I remember Tom from the bodgie days when he'd turn up at school out of uniform and be sent the principal's office.

He wasn't long at the high school before getting a job in a factory that developed commercial shelving systems. He later set up his own business installing

supermarket shelving and I hear he's a keen punter and investor in racing horses. He's been a long-term St Albans boy and I'd love to catch up with him.



Victor Mahorin was a high school boy whose parents were from the Ukraine. He became a solicitor and established his office in St Albans near the station. The police used to refer the minor criminal cases to him and he would charge some minor amount so that at least they were represented in court. I would go past his office occasionally and he would have his feet on up the desk that was completely covered in paperwork. Eddie Lacinski would help him with the paperwork because he was very good at that. Victor died early, I think because of complications related to diabetes. Lacinski then helped clean up all the paperwork so I guess that they were mates or business associates. He found that a number of people still owed Victor money for help that had been provided but Victor had not pursued the debts. He didn't care about that. I hear that Lacinski has written a book about his migration experiences but I haven't come across it.



Slawko Muc's family was of Polish-Ukrainian nationality - they migrated in 1950 and settled in Ardeer, but Slawko attended St Albans High School. He was a good friend of Leo Suszko who was also a Ukrainian refugee and he was living in Millawa Avenue near the high school. Leo was another Bonegilla hostel boy. Slawko became a dentist and is still operating in St Albans in Main Road East. As well as running the business he helps with dental treatment at some nursing homes.

Leo had a tough childhood because his father lost both legs and an arm when pushed under a train, and lived the rest of his life in various hospitals. Mrs Suszko moved with her children to St Albans. Leo worked in the meat industry and now owns a smallgoods factory and has several outlets based around Thomastown.

In 1962 I bought a Humber Super Snipe for £2 but I found sixpence in the car so it cost me £1/19/6.



The Hoods & Humber Snipe 1962 © S Kozlowski.



The Hoods & Humber Snipe 1962 © S Kozlowski.

I was with a group of mates we called The Hoods and we had a great time with the Humber. I parked the car in the driveway and one morning I heard all this banging and crashing and there were my mates pulling the doors off. I asked what they were doing and they said they were going to make a decent car out of it. We went across Main Road East which then was all open paddocks where the Sunshine Hospital now is and raced the car up and down the paddocks. As we were driving we saw something roll past us – the back wheel had fallen off! As we were driving down Biggs Street to the river the police pulled us up. They didn't book us but told us we were not allowed on the road and to take the car home.

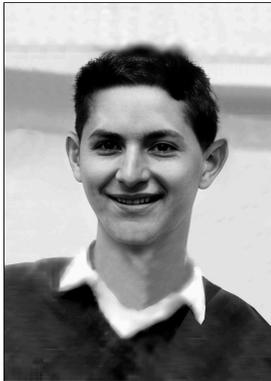


Dirt racetrack in Sunshine Ave 1960s © Otto Czernik.

We used to drive the car up and down the road from Cowper Avenue to Manfred Street but if we drove too long the motor got hot and we didn't know about radiators. One of the parents who knew something about cars would be waiting with a can of water to fill the radiator. We loved it and drove around until the police

come up and told us we weren't allowed to drive. We weren't hurting anyone and our parents knew what we were doing. I sold the old Humber eventually and made a few pounds profit.

The local policemen included Percy Mangles and Bill Betson. Years later my brother-in-law was a policeman working around Footscray. I visited one day at his station and saw photos of several guys pasted on the walls. I asked him who they were and he said they were petty criminals that they liked to keep an eye on. I knew them all! The police knew who the trouble makers were. When something happened they knew who to get.



One chap by the name of Eddie Lacinski now lives on the Gold Coast. Whenever he comes to Melbourne he always rings us to catch up. He said the police had their own methods to deter trouble makers. One day Eddie had had a bit too much to drink but instead of locking him up the police said his punishment was to go back to the police station and chop some firewood. He was a good tennis player, him and George Szwadiak. They were good friends and in the same class at the high school. Szwadiak is now involved with the St Albans Football Club in Kings Road.

Because of the police in bikethe area, we used to call the place Tombstone Territory. The kids would be arguing and brawling down this end and the police would come and break it up and it was backwards and forwards. But it was nothing serious.

There was a chap named Socrates Joannou that we called Socks. His sister Androulla was in my form and we caught up at one of the school reunions.



Opposite the Tin Shed there was a Mobil Garage run by Mick Certic who was originally from Yugoslavia and came here via Bonegilla. His daughter Luba went to the high school. I used to go past the garage every day and talk to him. He used to have some stock cars and had a mechanic named Little Eddie. Mick and Little Eddie would fire up these cars and they were as loud as anything doing wheelies on the concrete of the service station. The police would come and tell him off because the neighbours were complaining about the noise and the smell and the smoke. He'd say "I'm testing my car" but he'd quieten down after they came. The family moved to Sunshine in the 1970s and then moved to Queensland.

There were two barbers in St Albans that I remember. One was an Aussie guy named Cliff Snooks who was on the corner of Main Road and West Esplanade and then moved to Alfrieda Street. The other one was Socrates Joannou's father Xenenphon who lived in Main Road East not far from the old tennis courts on Errington Reserve and was the barber in the arcade. I saw Mr Joannou many years later and he said "I know you. I used to cut your hair and you had terrible hair." We were laughing our heads off.

Muyu had a little café on Main Road West and had a juke box in there. One day we heard the juke box was out of order and you could select tracks without paying. So we went there and were enjoying ourselves selecting music when he came and told us to get out. We said "But Muyu we are only listening to music." "Yes, but you are not paying for it." He called the police and we when heard them coming we nicked out the back door.

There were about five or six different gangs of different nationalities, but they weren't the thugs of today. Nevertheless the coppers saw them as a threat because they would congregate. The police had bodge squads. The youth groups were not violent but people were concerned because they were getting together as a group. Sometimes if a gang was congregated at a railway station the station master would call the cops and the flying squad would come down to deal with them. There were youth gangs in St Albans and they all had their territory. The neutral ground was in Main Road East where the Arcade was, up towards the Tin Shed, Alfrieda Street, and part of Main Road West. All the gangs used to meet on Saturdays and Sundays, some Friday nights, and they would be walking around, some with their portable juke boxes perched on their shoulder playing music, getting hamburgers and coke from the arcade and having a good time. The arcade was a popular place for hamburgers and chips and that's where you went and ate. Alfrieda Street was the same in being neutral ground.

Georgie Beris was a friend of Bev Toogood and was a good bloke who drove a big black V8. He was a bit of a boxer and as you were talking to him he'd sometimes start shaping up to you. He was with the group called The Untouchables who wore leather jackets with Untouchables written across the back. He was a genuine boxer and fought in the featherweight division in lots of Melbourne tournaments during the 1950s and 1960s. I don't know what happened to him after that.



Karl Wysniewski was the king of the St Albans bodgies. Another one was Saverio. They were all part of the local gangs. I think Karl was of Polish nationality but his father must have died as he came to Australia with his mother Maria and stepfather Jan Doroba. They lived in Albert Crescent near the railway station. Karl might have had some German heritage as his forenames were Karl Heinz, which are typical German rather than Polish names.

There was a guy named Zorro who was with the Maltese mob. We used to have a bit of a go at them because of this and that. You weren't allowed to venture into their territory. If you went in by mistake they'd give you a bit of a wallop, not hard, but enough to remind you to keep out of their territory. But the families were good people. A lot of those kids left school early, when they were 14 or 15, and went and got jobs. Work was everywhere. There was Nettlefolds, Spaldings, Monsanto, Massey Fergusson and many more. Work was everywhere, which was a good part of that era.

The groups were probably ethnic based but not entirely. Our group was five or six guys and we were a mixture. The gangs were more to try to show how tough you were, but in reality a lot of people spoke to everybody and laughed and joked. I was of Polish background but there never were any Polish gangs in St Albans; they were more towards Ardeer. The Polish boys were quieter kids.

One of the gangs used to congregate under the power lines south of the high school. They'd build a little fire and have a couple of beers and enjoy themselves.

Growing up as teenagers we enjoyed getting up to any mischief we'd get away with. There used to be a peppercorn tree near the station and I used to climb that and drop peppercorns on top of people walking past. The police would come up and say: "What are you doing up there? Get down from there!"

When we had the gates at the railway crossing the station master would turn a wheel inside his cabin and the gates would close. Whenever we were hanging around there we would jump on the gates and the poor bloke would have to put a lot of muscle into getting that wheel to turn. The whole mob would be sitting on the gate and the window would open and few choice words would fly out. We'd scatter like rabbits. It was silly but that was our fun.

I think it was Gary who brought in some cigarettes to school. This was the first time for our mob. At the end of the school there was a fence and behind the fence there was a bit of an indentation in the ground shielded by some grass, so the kids went there for a puff. But the teachers' room overlooked that area and the room being higher off the ground they could see us. So when they bell rang they were waiting for us. We'd say "not us, not us" but the teacher would point to the smokers. I never took up smoking but when you were roaming the streets you had a cigarette tucked behind the ear to make yourself look tough. So I never smoked but I walked around with a cigarette tucked behind my ear.

I remember that Gary had a pet sheep when were at high school, and this was what some families had in lieu of a lawn mower. Garry ended up working as a driver for Ingham Chickens at Portsea. He died of a heart attack.

Miss Bowles was the music teacher who tried to instill a love of music and singing in all her students. She tried to train us for the annual chorus that she featured as part of presentation day but some of us boys were not so keen for the traditional classics. One day she targeted our group for a practice session but we had our own agenda and started singing the chorus from "My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean". That's when she left the room.



Sylvia Kopmann wasn't too long in St Albans because her parents went back to Germany. They later came back to St Albans briefly before settling somewhere in Clayton. Sylvia and I were very close when she was in St Albans and would go to the pictures together. St Albans never had a picture theatre so people would go to Sunshine. When those people asked where do you live and you said St Albans it was "Oi Yoi Yoi. St Albans! I wouldn't go near there." Other people thought it was the dead end of the world and too rough for them.

I remember I went to the dance one time in the old community building in East Esplanade. The boys would be here, the women would be there, there would be different groups and dancing. Something was said and next thing it was on, pushing and shoving and yelling. A real barnie was going on. The police would come up and shut the place down: "Go home the lot of you!" Sylvia and I re-established our friendship later in life when she returned to Australia.



Most of my classmates were migrants but there were a few Aussies. Fred Honey was in my form and he was a third-generation St Albans boy. His grandfather was Fred Stenson who came to St Albans in the 1880s and had the orchard near our favourite swimming hole.

Murray Stevens was at the primary school in the 1950s and went on to Essendon Grammar. He was a third-generation local because his grand-parents were James and Agnes Stevens who came to St Albans about 1905 and their sons were well known in the area as they established several hardware and real estate businesses. There's a street named after Murray in the Stevensville estate, a recognition that not many other local kids could claim.

Robbie Priest and Colin Bell were also there. Robbie also was a third-generation local lad. His grandparents were the Lewises who had the old chook farm in Walter Street, and Robbie's father Alan played for the St Albans football club. Colin came from a large family of children who came from Traralgon in the 1940s. The father was an engineer.



Charlie Gatt is part of our pensioner club. He is of Maltese heritage and was at the high school in the 1960s. He used to be at the top of Cowper Avenue and he's still there. Gatt worked as a planner in the manu-facturing industry as a public servant with the consumer affairs department and as a parliamentary electoral officer. His voluntary work included being on the kindergarten and school committees, the multi-cultural consultative council and the migrant resource centre. At one stage he was representing the Overnewton Ward on Brimbank Council.

The Self brothers who had the super-market all lived along Victoria Crescent. They were an old established family of English origin and their supermarket dynasty started when Lewis built a small store in East Esplanade in the 1930s. The store expanded rapidly when the migrants started arriving and it became the biggest self-service store in Melbourne. Every-one went to Self Brothers & Goddard because they started selling lots of continental produce. Peter Self was at the primary school in my years and his father was an industrial chemist who was related to the supermarket family.



Christa Albrecht attended the Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and was at the St Albans High School in the 1960s. They were a German family with two girls (Christa and Irene) who arrived in 1954. Christa returned to Austria and became a teacher and has been teaching English for 30 years. We keep in contact through the internet and facebook. She likes seeing the old school photos.

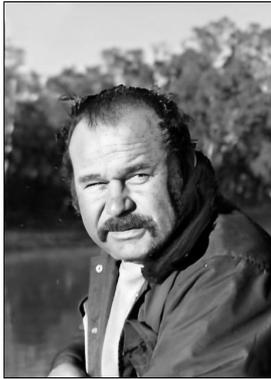
I joined the railways in 1961 after I finished at the high school. I did four years at the high school but didn't want to go further. I started working at the Flinders Street Station building, above the clocks. My office was behind the windows above the clocks. I was clerical. I worked there for about 30 odd years and took a break. Someone said there was better money outside so I went and worked elsewhere for 18 months. Then the railways took me back and I finished in 1994. The package came up and I took it. There were two packages. In 1984 a lot of the supervisors went and were told they could not return for so many years.

Where I worked was the electrical engineering branch. Anything electrical in the railways at that time was done by our mob. Because I did a lot of relieving I knew every section, so if a bloke didn't turn up for work I would take over his role. They offered a job to one of the fellas at the electrical workshop at Spencer, Latrobe and Lonsdale streets I think it was. They asked me to go in there for a little while until they got someone to work there. I was there for quite a while, somewhere between 10 and 20 years. To me it didn't matter where I worked. When I was in the office area I used to do the relieving all over the place. I'd go to Warragul and I'd drive there and stay at a hotel, because they gave you an allowance for the hotel. In those days petrol was not expensive. What I earned paid for the petrol over and over again.

For part of my time at the railways I worked with the fatalities section. Sometimes people were killed at the railway crossings and I had to inspect the scene and report on. There was no counseling or anything. You just did it and had to move on. That's the way it was. I did 24 years with the railways and took the package and finished up in 1994.

My parents lived at the Cowper Street house until they passed away. My father had worked at Wunderlich and passed away years ago because he got the big C. A lot of people who worked at Wunderlich died of cancer. The council had done a survey of that area and a lot of the older people have cancer-related illnesses, because when that asbestos was floating around people were breathing it in. I used to play in that stuff.

After my father died my mother didn't want to move away from there so we went to stay with her. She died in 1992. She'd worked in a place in Geelong Road where they made cardboard boxes. They all had jobs. People from that era were hoarders because they thought another war would come. My mother had cupboards stacked with food.



Dr Henry Liszukiewicz told us that his parents were the same in hoarding food because they thought there was going to be another war. His parents were Polish immigrants who came in the 1950s. Henry came to Australia as a teenager without any English but was smart enough to get a couple of scholar-ships and studied medicine at the Melbourne University. He went into practice with Dr Igor Balabin. Liszukiewicz is a tongue-twister of a name so he was usually known as Dr Henry. He fitted into St Albans beautifully because he spoke seven languages. He died much too early, of cancer, in 1994.

Valerie and I moved out of mum's house in 1974 and settled in Deer Park near the shopping centre. We've been here ever since.

In 2008 I got the Prize of the Australia Medal. On one of our pensioner trips near Avenal near Euroa a double-B truck had rolled across the road and burst into flame in front of our bus. I grabbed a fire extinguisher and found the driver's hand sticking out the window and dragged him out. Ten seconds later the cabin blew up. The ambulance took him away and though seriously injured he survived. Unknown to me one of the women on the bus nominated me for that award and I had to go to the MCG to collect that. Eventually I received a letter from the Humane Society to collect the Bravery award from Government House. It was sort of scary because everything you did there was very regimented in terms of the formal procedure you had to follow. Other award recipients such as the military people were sitting with their ornate epaulettes and decoration and I couldn't quite believe I was there.

Many years after we left the Bathurst migrant camp we went back for a visit. All that was there was some building rubble but the gum trees at the main entrance were still there as I remembered. I also took the pensioner club on a bus trip to Bonegilla and parts of that old army base and migrant camp have been preserved as a migration museum. It brought back lots of memories.



Steve and Valerie Kozlowski, 2018.

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Steve Kozlowski and Vanda Viti-Bognar, High School reunion 1996.



Steve Kozlowski, Ann Vennik-Frost, Evelyn Vroom-Hovenga, High School reunion 2006.



Steve Kozlowksi, Margaret Dusting, Andy Kratsis, High School reunion 2016.
