

VICTOR PLIASKIN: PUBLIC SERVANT, RUSSIAN COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE

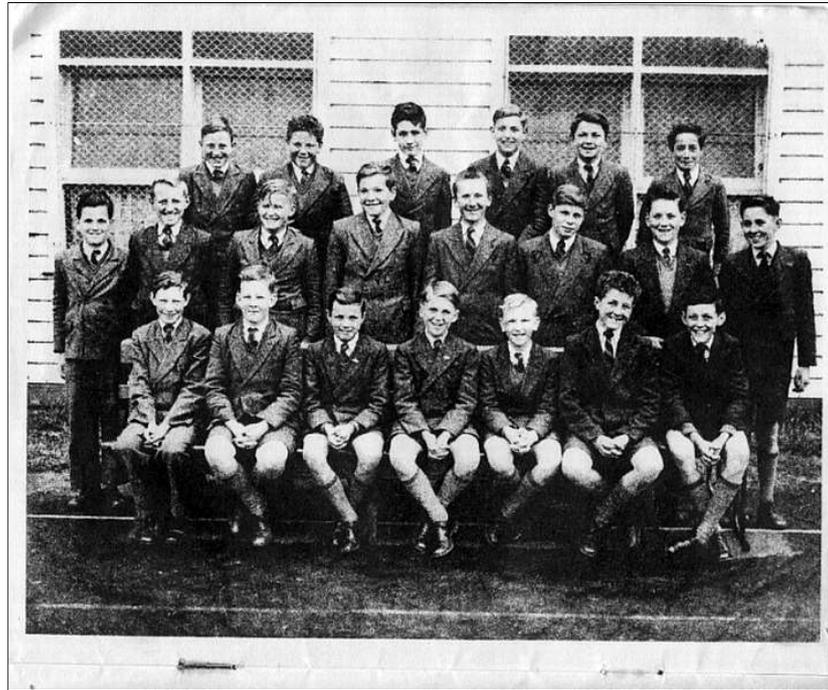


My name is Victor Pliaskin. I was one of the founding students of this school way back in 1956.

My family were ethnic Russians who were living in the town of Harbin in Manchuria, China. With the upheaval of war my parents decided to emigrate and came to Australia in 1954 because a relative was already living here, in Deer Park.

In its first year, the school was housed in the church hall of the Presbyterian church in Anderson Road, Sunshine, which wasn't very far away from where I was living in Deer Park. There were four classes with about 140 students in all: the girls were in 1A and 1B and the boys were in 1C and 1D. We all felt that we were all grown up as we were "high school students" and not just primary school kids anymore. This feeling was accentuated by the fact that we had no one more senior above us. We were it!

The vast majority of students were from overseas. It was a mini United Nations! There were about twenty-five boys in my class and only five of them were born in Australia, the rest of us having come from places like Latvia, Germany, Poland, Yugoslavia, Russia, and even England. The Anglo names included Potter, Smith, Ward and Wardle. The European names were more challenging: Stanislavskis, Szczudlinski, Vadnjaj and Vastchenko.



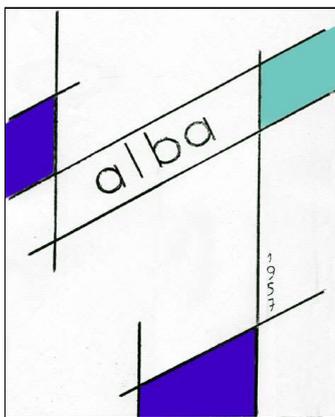
St Albans High School Form 1C, 1956.

As far as accommodation was concerned, the school was primitive even by the then standards. The main hall was divided into two classrooms by temporary partitions so one could hear two teachers simultaneously conducting different lessons. At the back of the main hall there were two other rooms and students had to transit other classrooms in order to get to their own. However not everything was doom and gloom, for we had access to marvellous church gardens, tennis courts and a grandstand of our own to the cricket pitch cum football field. My spotlight for the year was when I won a prize in the Electra Drama Group's poster competition. Mr. Crick was the local member of parliament who presented the prizes. My teachers must have been impressed because next year I was on the art committee for the school magazine.



Mr Barker and Mr Crick M.L.A. presenting awards, 1956.

It was a different story next year when we finally moved into our own, purpose-built premises in Main Road East, St Albans. It was nice to have normal classrooms but we lost this pioneering spirit although we were pioneers of a sort in another way as expansive grasslands met us with scotch thistles growing profusely. There was a huge septic tank acting as a landmark with accompanying aroma emanating from its bowels. But it was still fun.



In 1959 I was on the Arts Committee of the Magazine Committee with Nina Diakonow (Jacaranda house captain) and Rosalie Hermann (prefect). Among the prefects that year there were two Australians, three Ukrainians, two Latvians, one Englishman, one Irishman, and one Yugoslavian. I had the pleasure of designing the front cover for the magazine, which was printed at the school and the covers individually hand-coloured by volunteers. The design was in the minimalist style. The rest of the booklet was in plain black and white but that was no problem because the artwork was all of lino cuts realised in black ink anyway. It was a good year for me, academically speaking, as I passed in eight subjects, but Rosalie Hermann out-performed as all as she was the only one who tackled and passed in ten subjects.

I had to leave St Albans High on completion of the fifth year in 1960. From an original intake of 140 students in 1956, there were only 22 of us remaining in 1960 and we only had some five or six students wishing to do the final year. So I transferred to Sunshine High.



FORM V

Back Row: Jeff Pay, Jeff Barlow, Vambola Stanislavskis, Richard Szezudlinski, Wladimir Muc., Les Thurgood. **Middle Row:** Borut Vadnjal, George Shegedyn, Victor Pliaskin, Tony Venes, Verners Pleiksna, Terry Smith. **Front Row:** Glenys Pell, Switlana Bohudski, Silvana Crespi, Vanda Viti, Jennifer Bruce, Frances Zeglinski, Margaret Smelley, Vejuna Kepalas, Doreen Gist, Toni Blahut.

On leaving school I joined the Department of Immigration, where I am still employed, as I thought I could use my language skills for my mother tongue is Russian. It came in handy occasionally but the work that I am involved in is in interpreting immigration laws of Australia rather than languages. I am fortunate to be married to a lovely lady and we have two daughters who have both graduated from Deakin University in Applied Sciences.

During the last couple years I have made several trips to Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia but not with the Department for I have been involved in voluntary work with the Victims of Chernobyl National Relief Fund which was established in 1990 as a not for profit charitable organisation. This organisation assists people who had suffered as a result of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl and has sent food, medicine, and clothing to them. We also bring children to Australia on health holidays for several weeks at a time. My involvement with this work rewarded me in many ways including the opportunity to pilot the largest plane in the world, the Antonov.

This is my story to date.

Victor Pliaskin, 1996.

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Victor Pliaskin (third from left) with colleagues, 1996 school reunion.

Note: Victor Pliaskin in conjunction with the Victorian College of the Arts School of Film and Television has made a documentary film about his family's journey from Siberia and living through the Japanese occupation in Harbin before escaping to Australia. Title: A Refugee's Eulogy (1996).

Victor was a member of the Russian Ethnic Representative Council in Victoria (RERC) which is the peak umbrella organisation for the diverse Russian community in Victoria.

Victor passed away in May 2015.

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