

# LUBA UWAROW nee SZWED: TEACHER

## Introduction



I was born Luba Szwed in Mildura in 1951. Hasn't time flown! My parents were Maria and Michael Szwed who migrated to Australia in April 1950 to "the best country in the world" as they later said. I agree.

My parents were both born in Belarus but were from different villages. The region was under Polish rule at the time and when the Germans invaded Poland in 1939 they also occupied Belarus. My mum and her sister Olga were in their late teens when the Nazi invaders forced them and many others to work in Germany to assist with the World War Two effort, as the factories were being depleted of German men who were being conscripted. That is also how my father ended up in Germany

where he and Mum met and married after the war.

## Displaced Persons

After the Allies defeated the Nazis in 1945 my parents became part of the mass of homeless refugees or displaced persons who had no idea what was going to happen to them. But life goes on whether your future is clear or not, so they married and my elder sister Kathy was born in Germany while they were still in the refugee camp. There was little hope of returning to Belarus because it was now under Russian control and my parents did not want to live under the Communists. Mum was in a dilemma because she was worried that not returning to Belarus would be seen as "deserting" and possibly mean her family would be sent to Siberia. The threat of being sent to Siberia was not just imaginary, as Stalin had in fact proposed that Soviet nationals who had lived under German occupation be exiled to Siberia.



Szwed family IRO photos (L-R): Michal, Maria, Kateryna, Mykola; circa 1949.

Things remained very unsettled and unresolved over the next two years, so when in 1947 some of their friends from the camp were accepted to migrate to South America, Mum and Dad decided to join them. They applied and were pleased to be accepted.

Then Mum fell pregnant again and was not allowed to join the others who were leaving on the ship. At that stage they probably would have gone anywhere to escape the poverty and hardship of their existence - as long as it was not Russia.

They were still in Germany when my older brother Nick was born in 1949. After that time my parents chose to come to Australia and risk this unknown part of the world rather than go back to their war-torn homeland.

## Migrating to Australia

The family of four left by train in late 1949 headed for Italy, from where the IRO-chartered ships were leaving for Australia. In Italy they boarded the Princess Helena for their new homeland.

When they arrived in Melbourne they were taken to Bonegilla and spent a couple of months in the migrant camp there. Then they were sent to another camp near the airport in Mildura, and spent about a year or more there. That's where I was born, in Mildura.

Dad eventually left the migrant hostel to get a job in Footscray. He wanted to earn more money so he could buy a block of land and start building a home. So while he was in Melbourne Mum and the two kids were in Mildura. Then in April 1951 we moved to St Albans and into the house that Dad built, and I really haven't left the area since then. In fact it was just a part house that Dad had built, so we were like all the other migrants who were starting off in a little bungalow. I was about one month old at the time, so I knew nothing of what was happening but I've heard the stories.

## Growing up in St Albans

I remember my childhood as being very happy and I enjoyed growing up with my older sister Kathy, big brother Nick, and baby brother Victor. We grew up on Beaver Street, just a few minutes walk to the St Albans railway station and virtually just around the corner from the high school when it was built.



Szwed family (L-R): Luba, Katy, Victor, Maria, Nick, Michael, circa 1960.

We lived in a neighbourhood drawn from different countries of the world and I grew up with friends like Teresa (Polish), Lydia (Ukrainian), Alice (Polish), Yanni (Estonian), Philip (Australian), Susan (Australian), and Leo and Maria (Czechoslovakian). Is that multi cultural or what? Even Mr Bolvari, who was my French teacher at the St Albans High School, moved into Beaver Street for a while and became good friends of the family.

## Primary and Secondary Education

I started school at the old St Albans Primary in West Esplanade, which I attended for about a month whilst the St Albans East school was being finished. To me the Principal Mr Carney was quite memorable because he was into Irish dancing in a big way! Those were great years when my Mum would ride her bicycle to school with a flask of hot chocolate at lunchtime and those shelter sheds protected us from the weather.

I remember my years at the St Albans High School for a number of reasons. Uniforms were a big thing at the school and for the girls it included summer and winter outfits, berets, gloves, tunics,

ties, and grey stockings. I made quite a number of friends and there were very memorable teachers such as Mr McLeish, who was my favourite English teacher. He was always encouraging and optimistic. Others included Mr Alcorn, Mrs Gliddon, Ms Butler, Mr Torpey, Mr Chilton, and Mr Malaniuk, the Russian teacher. Wasn't Mr Webster a hunk and just a young thing then!



Form 3 class with Mr Chilton, 1967. Luba Szwed is third from the right in the third row.

## Teaching Career

I always planned to be a secretary, so I chose the commercial course at school with typing and shorthand as core subjects. My ambition of becoming a secretary didn't eventuate, but hasn't the typing skill come in handy with the computer age? And they say you never learn anything at school!

After I completed form 6 I applied for a studentship and enrolled to do teacher training. I completed the three-year T.S.T.C Dip.Dom.Arts course at Larnook Teachers College and then one year at Emily McPherson College in the City.

In 1971 during my training I completed a teaching round at St Albans High School and discovered that the Home Economics Kitchen hadn't changed much since I left the school, and I don't think it has been upgraded yet!

I started teaching at Williamstown Girls High School in 1973 and had the pleasure to work with some wonderful Principals (all ex-St Albans High teachers) including Mr Arnold Shaw, Ms Irene Wescott, and Mr Davis (who was once my Art teacher at St Albans).

I have been teaching at Kealba College for twenty years and come across other teachers who also went to my old school. Paul and Lana Fox (she was Lana Mahorin before she married) are also former St Albans High students who are on the staff at Kealba. Last year I received acknowledgement of my 35 years of service to Education in Victoria.

## Mum's Philosophy on Life

Mum's philosophy of life was: "Don't worry, accept your lot in life. Try to improve it but accept it as it is." That philosophy of positive attitude in life and striving for progress but accepting the inevitable sustained her through the early years in her new home raising four young children. It also had to sustain her when she and Dad separated in the late sixties, though she continued to live in the home in Beaver Street.



## Visiting Belarus

By the mid 'fifties Mum had re-established contact with her family in Belarus through one aunt with whom she corresponded. Then in 1977 I went with her for a holiday to her old home town. That was an interesting experience. The place looked pretty run down, with poor streets, few shops, and there were queues for food. We arrived in time for Mum to see her beloved Uncle Peter who was quite elderly and unwell. He was really pleased to see her. Mum's sister had returned to Belarus after the war and had obviously survived though she was lamenting not having joined Mum in migrating to Australia. She was now echoing mum's original belief that the communist system had done no good for the area.

Mum passed away last year (2005).



Mrs Maria Szwed with grandchildren and daughter Luba.

## Personal Situation

I married in 1974 and have four wonderful children: Phillip (now aged 27), Marisa (24), Tanya (22) and Mark (20). My marriage lasted 21 years, which is quite a long time by today's standards.

I am currently living in Keilor Downs, which is a distinct district with its own identity, but it's part of the area that was included in the St Albans of earlier days, so it's true to say I have lived in St Albans all my life.

My favourite pastime at present is Ballroom Dancing.

Maybe after another five years in Education I will consider retiring. Sounds good to me.



**Luba Uwarow, 2006.**



Jutta and Nick Szwed, Luba Uwarowa , Paul Ledney, Anna and Victor Szwed, 2016.

<b>Menu</b>
<a href="#">People</a>
<a href="#">Photos</a>
<a href="#">History</a>
<a href="#">Albas</a>
<a href="#">Top of Page</a>
<a href="#">Home Page</a>

---

Photographs courtesy of Luba Uwarowa, reproduction by Nick Szwed.