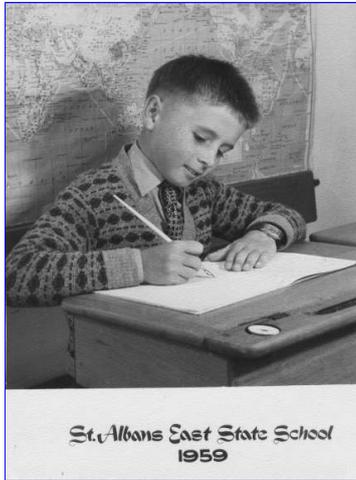


NICK SZWED: TRAFFIC ENGINEER

Introduction



My parents were born in Belarus which was under Polish rule at the time and when they were about 18 years old they were forced by the Nazi invaders to work in Germany to assist with their World War 2 effort. My father was Michal Szwed and my mother was Maria Chudzinska. They met and married while in Germany and my elder sister Kathy and I were both born in Germany.

When the Nazis were defeated my parents decided to go to South America with their friends. Belarus was now under Russian control and my parents had heard stories that anyone who helped the Germans was sent to Siberia.

Unfortunately my Mum was told she could not go on a long ocean journey in her pregnant state. So they missed the boat. Dad was furious with Mum and stressed out a bit while waiting. He was worried that the Russians would track him down and escort him to Siberia.

Migrating to Australia



By the time I arrived my parents had decided to go to Australia because they had heard some good stories about it and, I suppose, because it was so far away from the Russians. My mother loved this country and thanked God for his guidance in making the decision to come here right up until her dying day.

My mum and I were very sick on the ocean journey; it was probably food poisoning on the train prior to boarding the ship. My Mum was really concerned that I might end up being buried at sea.

We travelled on the Hellenic Prince which was previously an Aussie warship and arrived in Melbourne on 24 April 1950. We then travelled by train from Station Pier to Bonegilla. From there my parents headed off to work in

Mildura. My sister Luba was born in Mildura.

My dad then headed to Melbourne for better paid work in a factory in Footscray while we stayed in Mildura.



Kathy, Nick and Maria Szwed at Bonegilla, 1951.

Building in St Albans

Dad soon heard that land was very cheap in St Albans and bought a block in Beaver Street. Most people were building small bungalows but my dad decided to build a full house.

Mr Leo Dobes, a neighbour, drew up the plans and with the help of friends dad started building. It was slow going and mum was concerned at what he was up to down south. So he finally came up to fetch us.

We had very high expectations for our first house and were thoroughly let down as we stood in front of a half finished construction site. Anyway it was ours and that was special. So we started off in two rooms – like a bungalow.

My first memories of St Albans are of a small village where you soon got to recognise everyone you saw. And there were lots of paddocks to explore. My brother Victor was born soon after we came to St Albans.

One day a friend of mums arrived crying because she could not afford the rent and was being evicted. Well there was no hesitation, they would have to move in with us and each family could have a room.

Mum and dad didn't have much education. Mum had really wanted to go on with school but did not get the opportunity. She went back to "school" in later life in her seventies at Victoria University to study some English subjects. Dad started off as a factory worker. He learnt to operate metal turning machinery and gained a Fitter and Turner's trade certificate.

Ahmed Ajayoglu is the first kid I remember of my age group and school year level. He lived just around the corner from us before they shifted to a house opposite the primary school (with the tuckshop). He was just a couple of doors away from Leo Dobes junior who was a year behind us.

Starting Primary School

I started at St Albans State Primary School in 1955. I cried on my first day because after our first assembly everyone just walked away and left me standing there. I didn't know what I had to do or where I had to go. I was confused and just stood there and was left behind. The teachers had to get my big sister to console me.

I started school with people like Joe Ribarow, Anton Correlje, Otto Czernik, Michael Martignoles, Radenko Jankovic, Nina Skorobogati, Ingrid Wagner, Boronia Mazurek, Denise



Rogers (who was the first girl I chased in the play ground to steal a kiss), Lynette Cox, Theresa Hovenga, Peter Barbopoulos, Frans Jansen, Stefan Czyz, Ahmed Ajayoglu.

After school we'd go home, have a snack and then go outside and play with the neighbourhood kids and on weekends we would go and explore the paddocks. I can remember playing "chasey" and "hidey" in the streets. The best day was when there was such a heavy fog that you could just run straight up the middle of the street about 30 yards and disappear from the person who was "he". Before and after school in those days we used to listen to the "serials" on radio: Biggles, the Faraway Tree, Superman etc.

St Albans State School was filling fast so some of us had to move into a temporary school in the St Albans Hall. We then went off to St Albans East

when it opened in 1956.

I can remember having a crush on Lynette Cox, a fight with Marin Gunew, being monkey bar champ with John Farrugia (who later married Denise Rogers), lawn mowing monitor, watching my first TV shows at Ronnie Vella's place after school and grade 6 teacher Mr McAllen who gave some people nicknames like Sarge and Yoyo and barracked for Collingwood. Mr McAllen was so full of praise for Collingwood, I could not help falling in love with the club and still am.



Rear: Maria and Michal Szwed, Kathy. Front: Nick, Victor, Luba. 1950s.



Rear: Kathy, Maria, Michal Szwed. Front: Luba, Victor, Nick. 1960s.

Introduction to Television



I remember in 1956 wandering off to Errington Reserve with one of the local kids on a Saturday afternoon and being absolutely fascinated by the first television set that I ever saw. It was in the window of the cricket/footy club rooms behind the tin shed and was showing the Olympic Games. Soon after, you would see people gathering at shop windows where they sold TV sets watching this amazing new technology.

Apparently the take-up of Television by St Albans residents was one of the highest in Australia and the world. Maybe that was because it was a way for migrants to keep in touch with the outside world where they had come from.



It was probably in about 1959 when I went outside after getting home from school and having a drink. I stood there for a few minutes looking up and down the street. No kids to be seen. I turned around went inside and turned on the TV. After TV arrived the playing outside gradually disappeared.

I joined the Scout Cubs for a couple of years but instead of graduating to a full Scout I joined the St Johns Ambulance Cadets which I enjoyed more. Perhaps my sense of saving life or injury was there from the start (see my career later).

St Albans High School

In 1961 it was off to St Albans High. I can remember my first day: at morning recess we went to the door and I was bewildered to see so many kids. I had never seen so many kids in one place before.

Some of my best memories are Joe and I sitting behind Lynette and Helen in class in the middle years. I also remember in about Form 2 or 3 that I had an enormous desire to understand everything about the Universe and everything. I also used to read a lot of Sci Fi.



My worst memory is of “Big” Mr Smith screaming and abusing me in front of class for using my master key (I was locker monitor) to open a locker without his approval.

Some best friends: Joe Ribarow, Michael Hatjiandreou, Marin Gunew. Some girls I was attracted to: Lynette, Janice, Elizabeth, Maija and Jutta. My favourite teachers: Miss Nightingale and Mr McAllen in primary school, Miss Butler, Mr Rayner, Mr Matthews

at the high school.

At high school some of the friendships that started in primary school were cemented for life. Over the years, I’ve always kept in touch with Joe Ribarow, Michael and Cathy Hatjiandreou, Lindsay Chatterton and Peter Nowatschenko.



Form 4A with Miss Joan Butler, 1964.

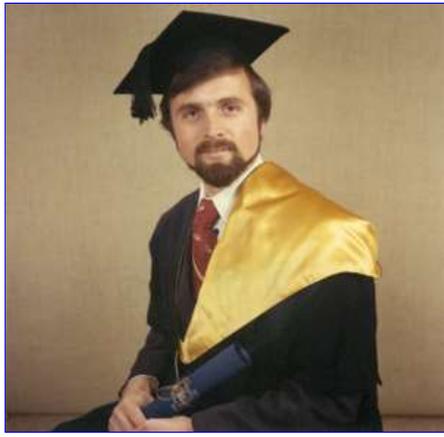
My parents' relationship was becoming quite rocky at this stage and I remember making a promise to myself to have a successful marriage and family life. When they split-up it became one of my life goals.

After St Albans High

I left St Albans High for University High at the end of Form 5, 1965. After the matriculation exams I got a job with the Commonwealth Bank and waited for the exam results. I had studied reasonably hard because I saw this as the only way to overcome my financial disadvantage. For a brief time I had thought about being a priest. I also almost joined the Air Force but in the end could not see myself in a uniform toeing the line. I also considered becoming a teacher.

I did quite well in the Matric exams but could not afford to go to Uni. I needed a scholarship, otherwise it would be a career in banking. I had applied for several scholarships and cadetships. Luckily I scored a cadetship with the Country Roads Board which paid my way through Uni. I studied civil engineering and then specialised with a Masters degree in Transport.

My marble came up to fight the war in Vietnam but I detested the idea so much that I somehow got the message through in the interviews and medicals and was not asked to enlist.



In 1969 while at Melb Uni I joined the Equality in Education Campaign. A guy called Uldis Ozolins was running it. I could never forget that name. I think he was related to Slartibartfast – the guy who etched out the Norwegian Fiords. (If you don't understand, you need to read The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy.) Anyway, Uldis told me that Norbert Loeffler at St Albans High was politically active and was interested in getting involved in the campaign so I arranged a meeting. We joined forces and started a bit of a campaign in the main shopping centre of St Albans on Saturday mornings. Norbert, I and a few other students handed out pamphlets and spoke to people

in the street about the importance of equality in education. One Saturday afternoon after handing out pamphlets, I got a phone call at home from 3AW and was interviewed about our campaign on air. It was great fun.



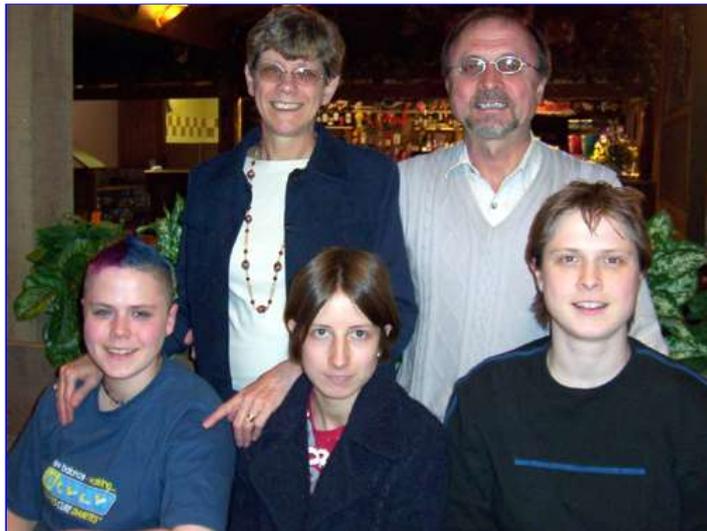
Uni Studies and Socialising

In 1967, in my first year at Uni, Marin Gunew was a good friend and he kept telling me about this wonderful girl who was doing matriculation with him at St Albans High. I met her at his 18th birthday. She was alright. Over the next couple of years a group of us would hang out together: Marin and brother Stefan, Lindsay Chatterton, Peter Nowatschenko and brother Paul, Michael Hatjiandreou and sister Cathy, Maija Svares, my sister Luba and brother Vic, Marilyn Hullett and Bruce, Marin's good friend Jutta Heymig and others. The attraction between Jutta and me grew quickly and we became an item.



The interesting thing is that we both went to St Albans East Primary and the High School together, just separated by one year. We must have passed each other in the corridors and grounds many times but we were never aware of each other until Marin introduced us.

We became engaged, then several months later split up. But the attraction was too strong and we got back together and then married in 1973. Jutta became a teacher, we worked hard and travelled a bit and couldn't make up our mind whether to start a family. We put off the decision for a while but eventually made up our minds to go ahead. We have three lovely daughters.



Life as a Traffic Engineer

I specialised in traffic engineering at the Country Roads Board/RCA/RTA/VicRoads. I also spent some time at the Ministry of Transport and a short time with a private consultant. I worked hard but could never quite conform to the corporate culture.

Towards the end of my career I ended up specialising in Road Safety. This was the most satisfying part of my career and a wonderful way to finish it. I was at a middle management level so I had a good degree of autonomy and ability to make decisions. But I was still a specialist respected for my engineering knowledge. Fortunately also, the government of the day had road safety on its agenda. I was thus able to bring in a number of new initiatives to save lives on the roads. My proudest example is the speed limits at schools and through strip shopping centres.

Semi Retirement

I went into semi-retirement in 2004 and continue to work part-time on road safety projects for VicRoads and manage a project examining speed limits on an Australasian basis for Austroads. I still maintain strong professional connections through lots of lunch time meetings in restaurants.

Even though semi-retired I am still quite busy, never enough time. But I set my own priorities and therefore have more time for socialising, drinking red wine, jogging, quaffing red, cycling, sipping red, hobbies, travelling and tasting reds, photography (still and video) and observing reds, bush walking (including serious off-track bush bashing), sniffing red, organising reunions, enjoying a red with friends, reading books on how the mind works, how the Universe works and articles on how red works.

It took me 40 years to understand life, another ten to really get the hang of it, and now I have just about perfected it. I'm still refining the art of enjoying each day to its fullest. Over the years I've thought a lot upon the meaning of life, the universe and everything. I reckon I had my mid-life crisis in my late 20's after my dad died. I am happy to have worked out what it's all about and now I feel at one with the universe.



Nick Szwed, 2006.



Menu

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