

BARBARA WHEELER nee TEICHMANN: FACILITIES MANAGER



Family Background

My family was from Berlin and we came to Australia in December 1959. I think we came to Australia because of my father's adventurous nature and I guess my mother's courage to follow him to the ends of the earth. That's really it, mum came because dad wanted to go.

I have two sisters: Marianne and Waltraud ("Wally"). We were all born in Berlin, including my mother Ursula and my father Heinz. As President John F. Kennedy once said, "Ich bin ein Berliner."

Migrating to Australia

We migrated to Australia through an arrangement with the Catholic church. We came to Melbourne and were meant to go to Bonegilla with the rest of the group who came with us, but we stayed in Melbourne because my sister Wally contracted measles and had to go to the infectious diseases hospital in Heidelberg. An ambulance came to the ship and took her and my mum to the hospital. The rest of us went to the Broadmeadows hostel.

My mother always said that the experience of being taken into the unknowns of an unfamiliar country was really horrific, because we didn't speak any English except the chorus from "My Bonnie lies over the ocean". After arriving at the hospital my mother had to leave my sister there and try to get to where we had been taken. They had told the nurses at the hospital to put mum in a cab and have it take her to the Broadmeadows hostel to join us. Mum was in the cab trying to memorise where the hospital was located. She had an address but it meant nothing to her, so she thought of remembering some signs to help her identify the location in future. She saw a distinctive sign on some overhead wires and thought she would remember if she saw it again and carefully copied it down. It was DANGER.



Ursula and Heinz Teichmann with (L-R) Marianne, Barbara, Wally.

Broadmeadows Hostel

I think we were in Broadmeadows hostel for about six months. My dad was a bricklayer and he went to work on the Snowy Mountains scheme because they were looking for bricklayers. He actually flew there and I remember us waving him goodbye. He was there quite a while and was making good money, but we missed him. My mother got a job in the hostel as a cleaner in the kindergarten.

Coming to St Albans

On board the ship we had made friends with the Haase family - Chrystal Haase went to school with us - and they had gone to Bonegilla. While they were there they met this couple from St Albans who were holidaying in the area. Mr Schwabe was a builder in St Albans who invited them to come and live in St Albans because he had a bungalow he could rent them. So Mr Haase brought his family to St Albans and started looking for my family. He found us in Broadmeadows and suggested we come to St Albans because there were lots of German settling there. That's what we did. There was a Mr Setek who was a real estate agent and he rented my parents a bungalow in James Street. Then my parents bought a block of land in Glyndon Avenue St Albans, where there they are still living. They had a house built and we moved there in 1961. It was just a little three-bedroom brick veneer and I don't know how we all fit in, but we did. My parents are still there.

Both my parents worked. One worked afternoon shift and one worked night shift. For a while dad worked as a bricklayer and was doing paving at Melbourne University. Then he worked in a factory in Albion, and that was Spauldings, and later he went to Nylex. Mum worked in a carpet factory known as Olympic Cables. Then they both worked in Malley's in Sunbury for a while. They were both hard working while we girls just grew up and went to school.

When I was in primary school in Germany I learnt some English, but it wasn't really proper English because it was taught by teachers who had never been in England who had been taught

by teachers who had never been in England, so I couldn't understand anything when I got here but it didn't take me long to pick it up. I'm a talker and a reader, so that probably helped me. In 1960 when we were at Broadmeadows I attended a primary school there and then I went to St Albans Primary for a couple of months when we moved to James Street. After that I went to the high school, which was in 1961.

St Albans High School

I loved all my school years and I loved St Albans High. In form one Elizabeth Zielinski was my friend and I'm still in touch with her. She and her husband are running a cleaning business. In form two I met Veronica Debevc and we became best friends as well as Elizabeth. It was a bit funny because we were really not allowed out after school, so each day it was school, home, homework, and you'd only see your friends only at school and on the weekends. It wasn't like people went out after school.

I loved Mr Pavlov who was our maths teacher. I think it was in form 1 that we had a maths competition, and I won. My prize was a kitten, which my mother didn't want, but she couldn't really say no. I had to go to the Mr Pavlov's place to choose the kitten. I loved that cat.

I liked Mr Youd but I never did art because I did CPP - Commercial Principles and Practice. We went with Mr McLeish to see "The Hill" which was a black and white film starring Sean Connery. That was about the only outing I remember going on. I played softball and vigoro, which is like cricket played with a banjo-shaped bat. I was with Jacarandah and in fourth form was House Captain for the Intermediate level. I didn't like going into the swimming sports because the boys used to give me heaps about my well endowed figure, Peter Szarko especially. I was girls form captain in fourth form and Lindsay Chatterton was the boys - it must have been the year for short people. Mr Ziemelis was our form teacher and he wrote a very nice comment about me in my report book saying I was a very helpful form captain.



Mr Ziemelis, sitting between Barbara Teichmann and Lindsay Chatterton, 1964.

I also liked Mr Hocking, who I also had for maths, but he came after Mr Pavlov. I liked them both, and Mr Ziemelis of course - he gave me 100 for German.

I remember going to the dances at the youth club that were organised by Lorna Cameron. She was the librarian at school and knew everybody. If she saw you walking home from the dance late at night she would stop and give you lift. On other days if it was very late at night it would

be: “Barbara, what are doing out so late? Do your parents know where you are? Get in the car and I’ll give you a lift home.” She was always a caring person.

I loved school and stayed till the end of 1964.



Mr Hocking with Peter Nowatschenko (left) and Joe Ribarow, 1964.

Joining the Bank

After that I joined the State Savings Bank of Victoria and was working in Sunbury. That was an adventure of its own. I would go on the train with all the Salesian College boys in the morning. It didn’t stop very long at the St Albans station so you had to hop on pretty quickly. Then in the afternoon I would catch the 4 o’clock train back. The bank let me leave a bit early so I could catch the train, except on Fridays when the bank was open till 5 o’clock. The people at the station were really good because they used to hold the train for me. If I wasn’t there they’d ring the bank and say “Where’s the little girl from the bank?”

On Fridays when the bank closed at 5 o’clock, Mr Prokop, who was the manager, would take me to his home for tea and then take me to the station at 7:30 so I could catch the train home. That used to be really good and I really liked working in the bank. I was about three years at Sunbury and then I went to 351 Collins Street where they had a computer. After there I worked in Footscray West, which was not so good because there were deceased accounts everywhere. We used to have people crying in the boss’s office and I’d make cups of tea for them. It was sad. When you were working in the city none of your customers died but Footscray West was an area of older people so customers were dying. It probably didn’t happen that often but the memory of it stands out because I was expecting.

In those days when you joined the State Savings Bank you had to sign a contract to say they could dismiss you when you married, because they didn’t employ married women. Married women were taking jobs from men. When I got married in 1969 I had to write a letter to the Commissioners of the State Savings Bank of Victoria asking to stay on. They gave permission, but said if you get pregnant you have to leave because it’s too dangerous for pregnant women to be in the bank.

Family

I married Richard Kolodziedzic who was also from St Albans, but he went to the tech school. Richard changed his surname by deed poll to Wheeler, which is derived from the English translation of the family surname which translates as 'wheelwright'. After we married we moved to Glyndon Avenue, just a few houses away from my parents.

We had two children: Kevin in 1971, and Steven in 1972. Kevin was born in the Footscray Hospital and Steven in the Western General - same place, different names. They are both single and happy little vegemites. Both of them are working. Kevin is a trained school teacher but is working in the clerical field and never took up teaching. Steven is a chef.



Barbara and Veronica at class reunion, 2005.

Work and Further Education

I didn't work while the children were little and then joined the public service in 1980 in the property section. At this stage my mother used to take the boys each morning to school, so I never had to worry about child care.

In the meantime I had done my HSC in 1977-78 through night school at St Albans High. I also did German at Princess Hill High School through the Saturday School of Languages scheme. I couldn't afford to do a full course so I thought to do some German to start off with, which was really good. The teacher wasn't sure whether to take me on because I hadn't been to school for about 15 years and she didn't have the time for individual attention. I felt really intimidated. They gave us a test to check our knowledge of German grammatical endings and I got 100%. That test question was on the HSC exam the previous year, so the teacher said she would consider me but reiterated she didn't have time for individual tuition. I ended up getting 98% for the HSC German exam at the end of the year.

I also did English through the local night classes, and the following year I did Legal Studies and Australian History. I couldn't do maths because I had left too long a gap in my studies and I couldn't pick up anything that needed continuity. I needed something which I could get some textbooks to read and learn that way. Australian History was ideal for that, and so was Legal Studies.

Melbourne University

However I decided to take a different direction and chose what I thought would be the hardest place to get into, so I ticked only one box for my choice of study, and that was for German at Melbourne university. I was almost overwhelmed by the thought of it when I got in, but it was a good experience; that was in 1979.

Then I joined the public service in 1980 and they supported me in continuing with the studies by paying the fees. The arrangement was that you paid the fees when you started and if you passed they would reimburse you for the fees, but you had to pass. I arranged my studies around my work and would go to lectures at 5:15; I was allowed some time off work to get to lectures. I took me about 8 years to finish all my studies at Melbourne because it was all part time. I did German 2 and Germanic Studies 2, then German 3 and Germanic Studies 3. I did English 1,

Russian Literature and Society, and then I did English 2. I finished in 1987 with a qualification as Bachelor of Arts.

Husband's Support

I couldn't have done anything without my husband, because he was really supportive. When I was up late at night writing my essays he would stay up and make me cups of tea and count the words for me. He was fabulous. He was very good in looking after the two boys when they were growing up.

During this time Richard was working at Nettlefolds in Albion. Richard went to Sunshine Tech and then got an apprenticeship at Nettlefolds. After that he worked for Defence Support at the Ammunitions Factory as a turner and toolmaker. Later he was involved in quality assurance and as a technical officer with Defence Support. That was at the Ammunitions factory in Maribyrnong, but then they moved that to Benalla and he moved to Victoria Barracks.

Working for Defence

I liked working at Victoria Barracks. When I became property officer I looked after all the Victorian properties, such as the housing for married personnel, etc. Property management meant looking after all the paperwork dealing with leases and licences, complying with all regulations related to property, as well as buying supplies and requirements for the properties. The army is very self sufficient. I continued to work there until 1992, after which I went to work for Defence Centre Melbourne and I was the facilities manager, which meant looking after the property and maintenance issues for Victoria Barracks. I was in charge of occupational health and safety, fire services, and writing evacuation procedures. Then I became the fleet manager, which meant I was the purchasing officer for uniforms and accoutrements such as headware and footwear for army personnel. I really enjoyed doing that and got an Australia Day Award for my work there.

Then I decided to go back to school and enrolled in a course for professional writing and editing at Victoria University in St Albans when they first offered the course. They asked me what writing I had done, and I told them Evacuation Procedures and Fire Services manuals, neither of which were good stories. I did that course part time for 5 years, and I loved that as well. I did lots of writing, started a novel, and wrote a couple of plays. I haven't had anything published yet.

Retirement

I retired in 2001 at the time as my husband. By then he had been working as a technical officer within the ammunitions sector. After retiring we went for a holiday to Germany and caught up with relatives. My girlfriend who I've been writing to ever since we were in primary school together invited all our colleagues from grade 6 and we had a reunion. We also visited my cousins.



Lindsay Chatterton, Barbara Wheeler, Nick Szwed at reunion, 2005.

We often go to Bright twice a year and have travelled to Western Australia. We've just come back from Lakes Entrance. Richard plays golf, and I'm a member of the Barwon Heads Seachange Quilters. In 1997 I did a course in quilting at the Hunt Club in Deer Park. It was an activity I'd always been interested in, and now I'm happy just quilting away with my best friend Janine. This year I'll have three quilts in the Barwon Heads exhibition.

Barwon Heads is a lovely area. We bought some land there in 1992 and later built a holiday house. One of our favourite events in Barwon Heads is the duck race, which is held to raise money for local groups and charities. The entrance fee of \$20 allows you to select a duck from the flock on offer (they are plastic ducks) and you get a little training manual and certificate verifying they are free of bird flu, so you don't have to worry about that. They advise a training regime of putting the duck in water for half an hour each day to build up its stamina. On the big day of the duck race they put them all in wheely bins and throw them off the pier and they race towards the bridge. The first duck past the bridge is the winner. Afterwards you all collect your duck and keep it as a memento. It's a very popular event because there is usually two to three hundred entrants.

My parents are still alive and still living in the house they built when they first arrived. They are still well as far as the health is concerned. Both my sisters are married. Marianne has 3 children: Sandra, Tina, and Danny, who are all married. Sandra is in Sunbury, Tina is in Greensborough and Danny lives in Glenroy. My other sister Wally has a son Jeff, who is in the fire brigade, and a daughter Kate who is at Brimbank College, the old St Albans Tech School.

Both of Richard's parents have passed away. His mother died when Richard was 5 (they were living in Geelong at that time), and his father died in 1992.

The only school colleague I'm still in contact with is Otto Czernik. Otto had been a good friend and we'd gone on holidays together with his first wife. I knew her because she was also of German background and living just a couple of streets away. Otto was one of the quiet people at school, the type that sometimes you don't notice they are there, but he was there in the background. He's now living in Kyneton.

I still have got good memories of the high school.

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Barbara Wheeler, 2005.



Richard and Barbara Wheeler at 2006 reunion dinner.



Richard and Barbara Wheeler at 2006 reunion dinner.

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