

# TOM TSCHEREPKO: BONEGILLA TOM

## Coming to Australia



I came to Bonegilla in 1950 as a two year old and stayed there with my father for 12 years because he worked as a cook. In fact we stayed there until they kicked us out because they were gradually closing the place down.

My father, Stepan, was born at the beginning of the first world war in the village of Starodub, Russia. He was conscripted into the Russian army for the second world war, but after the war he abandoned his machine gun, changed his name and walked to freedom. In Germany he said he was Ukrainian. Like many men in the Russian army he was worried about returning home for fear of reprisal against ‘traitors’, i.e. men who had surrendered rather than taking their own life in fighting the German army, and those who had fled as refugees. He knew that Stalin was executing his own people or sending them to forced labour camps in Siberia. My father ended up in Germany with lots of others in the work camps that had become refugee hostels. Here he met and married Daria, a Ukrainian woman with three children, but the daughter died; Viktor and Waldemar became my half-brothers. I was born on 23 June 1947 in Munich, Germany, and became part of the great mass of Displaced Persons who were looking for a new life.



My mother died unexpectedly in 1949 when I was only two years old, leaving father with the care of myself as a young child and the two stepsons, Victor and Wally, who were at least ten years older than me. We migrated to Australia, spending our first few months at the Migrant Reception and Training Centre in Bathurst before moving to Bonegilla in March 1950. My stepbrothers were sent to a boarding school in New South Wales not long after we came to Bonegilla.

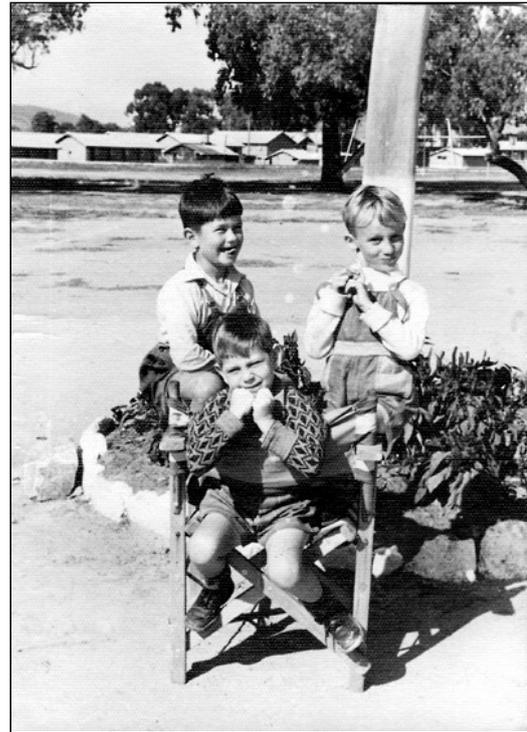
My first memory of Australia is not a happy one. It was when I was a two-year-old and my father had taken me into town, where he'd had a couple of drinks and we were returning to the migrant hostel by taxi. My father started arguing with the taxi driver because the driver was taking the long way back - “going around in circles” was the way my father described it - presumably so he could charge a higher fare and dad wasn't happy with that. The driver then stopped and got a big shifter out of the boot and was threatening to use it. I got scared and started screaming and crying, which somehow calmed the situation down because they both could see the effect it was having on me. But most of my memories are good ones.

But growing up in the area you get to love it, so my early years there and my close association with my father are all positive memories. I remember the enjoyment of the outdoors as I grew older: I went swimming, fishing, and there were rabbits everywhere. Having a bicycle I grew adventurous and explored as much as I could. I got to know the lake, the weir, Albury, Wodonga and Bonegilla. I had my own rabbit farm. I had dogs and a ferret. After a while you got sick and tired of eating mutton so rabbit was a welcome change. People would go rabbit hunting and come back with a heap of them strung over a long pole. You could always sell your extra catch to some willing customers.

People would have their gardens on the hillside and you would help yourself to a couple of tomatoes or a water melon – they didn't care. People used to pay me to pick mushrooms, because I knew the right ones to pick. I still do. When I was hanging around with these two older guys, we



found these little valleys that we called Little Valley and Big Valley, where we discovered fool's gold. Everything was a way of making a quid so it was thruppence for me to take you to Little Valley and sixpence for Big Valley and the opportunity to find your own traces of gold. I found this old abandoned farmhouse that was miles and miles away and still had all these fruit trees. I would go there in season and there would be these lovely peaches and yellow plums and other fruit. When the Hume Weir was down you could catch freshwater crayfish. I'd come home with four of them and my dad couldn't believe it. I'd catch redfin and bring them home for dad to cook up a lovely fish dinner.



I went to Glenn Innes every year because I had two

stepbrothers who went to boarding school there. The government had sent them there. Glenn Innes is near Tamworth. I liked going there as a kid during the school holidays and my dad probably also loved it when I went because he could have a bit of peace and quiet as well as enjoying a drink. He had a good time and I had a good time with my brother Wally. Wally ended up getting a job in the dry cleaners and then he leased the business and ran it. Victor ended up working as a butcher in Darwin. He also ended up a pisspot and died quite young, in his fifties. Victor had come back to Bonegilla in 1961 at the time of the riots and became friends with one of the coppers. I'd got myself into a bit of trouble at the time and my brother banged on the door late one night yelling "Police!" in order to give me a scare. It certainly worked.

I was hanging around with Stefan Klepiak at the time and he was a bit of a terror and became known as "the Bonegilla Kid" because he was always getting into trouble and coming to the attention of the police and court magistrates. His mother was German and his father was Polish and a pretty tough guy. Gerald "Hocko" Hochheimer was another of Stefan's friends. They were older than me and would often get up to mischief, which probably influenced me as I was pretty cheeky at times.

I saw my brother Wally less often and one day there was a handsome young man about 18 years of age getting off the bus stop while I was marching around playing a soldier. He asked me would I know the Tscherepko family and I said "I am the Tscherepko family." He said "I'm your brother." Straight away I said "What did you buy me?" He'd got me a toy gun and I was so impressed. He'd come there to tell us about his engagement to a girl he'd met at Glenn Innes.



My father began his working life in Australia as a labourer in the wood yard until he was offered a job as a kitchen hand in Block 14.

From there he was able to work his way up to the position of Chef in the Hospital Block, which was a permanent position. After twelve years at Bonegilla, my father and I moved to Melbourne. It was the end of an era because the hostel was my home and moving out was like leaving my childhood behind, which I was doing anyway because I was now a teenager ready to move onto bigger and better things. Dad's best mate at Bonegilla had been Ivan Koliba, who was the shoe repairer there. If you ever see that classic Bonegilla postcard of an unidentified cobbler with a young girl, that's Ivan Koliba and his daughter, Daria; they were in Block 14. The Kolibas moved to St Albans, so when my father left Bonegilla I came and stayed with them.



Stephan Tscherepko (second from right) with fellow staff, Bonegilla, 1950s.

## Starting School

Going to school was a funny introduction to a new stage of Australian life. I'm Russian Orthodox by religion but that changed once I went to Mitta Junction state school. Mr. Brodie was a Catholic and when he was enrolling me in the school he asked me: "What are you, Church of England or Catholic?" I said I was Russian Orthodox. He said "You're Catholic." I said my name was Anatolij. He said "Your name is Tom."

I was there since grade one or bubs, and Mr. Brodie wanted me to go to Christian Brothers. He knew my dad liked a beer and that I didn't have a mother, so he wanted me to go to the Christian Brother's college, St Thomas Aquinas, but I discovered that all you do there is pray. I met Tony Flannigan there and we had a fight and then became best of mates and got into a few scrapes together. He had a brother and stepfather in Wodonga who was a headmaster. He worked in the tuck shop at the school which was handy for me because I got a few perks.

I believe the most lasting legacy that the primary school gave me was a name that has stayed with me ever since, because “Bonegilla Tom” is still an identity that I relate to. Decades later when the 50th anniversary of the migrant camp was being celebrated I was invited as a guest speaker and panel member for events in Albury and at the Immigration museum in Melbourne. People wanted connections with the Bonegilla experience and I was able to provide some.



Stephan Tscherepko (left) with colleagues at Christmas festivities, Bonegilla, 1950s.

In Bonegilla when I was growing up there was this beautiful hall. Danko Martek was an artist and painted a mock Tudor setting in the recreation building that later became known as Tudor Hall. This was for the visit by Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh in 1954. Martek also did the decoration at the Benalla railway station. He was a patrolman at Bonegilla and his artwork and decorations were done in his spare time. In the Olympics year 1956 he had a lot of work. I used to go there because he said I was like his second son. Every year when the Wodonga festival was on he did a lot of the paintings and dressed up as a Viking and I was his little Viking kid. He made the costumes himself. At Christmas time when he was delivering the toys and things from his van and I gave out the little toys and ice creams. I ate that many ice creams ... It was an exciting time for a young lad and Martek was my hero because he made me part of all the excitement. They were good times. Martek was an interesting person and such a talented artist. He ended up working for The ABC in Melbourne as an art designer, I think, and he also reconditioned a lot of the artwork at Luna Park. He loved his glass of scotch and listening to classical music. He lived next to the recreation hall where he was in charge of the library and entertainment. I never had to pay to get into the movies because I had a key to get in if he wasn't there to let me in. He had a little office upstairs and sometimes if I called in and could hear a bit of Tchaikovsky from upstairs I suspected he might be painting a pretty lady's portrait. He married a Russian lady. I was at the movies several times a week since I was six years old. He gave me all the movie posters as mementos but in the end I had so many of them that my dad threw them away.



Danko Martek with artwork for "Tudor Hall", Bonegilla, 1954.

I remember that there were two riots at the camp when I was there, one in 1952, and another in 1961 towards the end of our time there. The 1952 incident was stopped very quickly when the army brought out tanks. A couple of tanks and that was the end of it - it quietened down just like that. The riot police were called in for the 1961 incident. The big problem was that people were expecting to be given jobs but there were no jobs available at the time so after two years of waiting they were not very happy and prepared to show it. I rode my bike down there sticky-nosing around during the demonstration and I got a belt across the backside from a copper for my trouble. It hurt, too.

At that time we were living in the hospital block, which was the best block in the camp. There were big verandahs and that's from where I was watching when I went sticky-nosing to see what was happening. They had about 200 riot police in busses and they raided a number of rooms looking for weapons.

I was there when the Hungarian refugees started coming after the Hungarian revolution in 1956. I remember that a few families died tragically because of accidental gas poisoning from briquette heaters. The barracks were very cold because they were just unlined corrugated iron and the rooms had no heaters so they were very cold. People devised their own methods of heating and some of these were quite dangerous. We had a little electric radiator.



Father Christmas (or is that Father Frost?) comes to Bonegilla.

The first Bonegilla Scout group was started by Constable Alf Besford, who was the policeman at Bonegilla at the time. I believe he started that in 1959, so I would have been about 12 when I joined. The memories I have are all fond ones. I was taught how to tie knots and still use them today - the bowline, reef knot etc. We were taught first aid and how to treat snake bites. We went

on camping trips along the Murray and Kiewa rivers and learnt survival skills like catching rabbits, cooking damper and building overnight shelters. The Scout leaders taught us about honesty, politeness and having respect for other people. I remember finding a wallet and handing it in to the Mr. Besford, who was our scout master, and receiving a reward of ten shillings. I took all my mates to the Bonegilla canteen and bought us all lollies and ice cream until we had it coming out of our ears, and I still had change left.

We'd organise 'Bob a Job' drives to earn some money for the Scout group to buy tents and camping gear. We did all sorts of odd jobs for people we knew and I found I was good at making money back then - and still know how to make it today! I still remember some of the names from that scout pack: Lindsay, Stefan, Gerald, Felix, Bogdan, Rinehart and Peter. There were others and they are part of my good times and memories of growing up in Bonegilla.

Paul Crowe was a teacher at Bonegilla who had played for the Wodonga football club and was coaching a football team at the migrant centre school. He would tell the story how the Bonegilla boys lost their first ever game of Aussie Rules against the Wodonga team, partly because they only had gumboots or sandals for footwear and mainly because they played the game as if it was a soccer match.

Colonel Henry Guinn was in charge of Bonegilla. It had originally been an army camp so I suppose it was natural that the army or former army officers should continue to control the premises. I got to know his daughter, Caroline, because she went to the same school.

Stefan Klepiak was another of the boys who came in the fifties; he was of German background. He wrote up his escapades in the book "The Bonegilla Kid." He was older than me and on occasions I tagged along him and his mates because they were always up to something.

The Rapsey family had a farm near the hostel and that farm was called Bonegilla Park so perhaps the area or the army base was named after the farm. The son, Lindsay Rapsey, and some of the other local boys joined the Bonegilla scout group, so we did have some Australian members in our group of mixed European heritage. Lindsay's mother, Stella Rapsey, was the district commissioner for the Girl Guides. I worked occasionally on the Rapsey farm as a teenager and I loved the foods they dished up such as fresh scones for morning tea and roast lamb for dinner.

## Leaving Bonegilla

I loved Bonegilla. I would still be there now except they kicked us out. When my father left Bonegilla he continued working as a chef for the Immigration department and these were generally live-in positions. His first job after Bonegilla was at an old hostel for English migrants that was next to the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne. There was a big fenced off area and it was an English migrant hostel. He was still friends with Bill Dunne from Immigration so I guess he would hear about opportunities. I used to go there to visit him and he would give a matchbox full of thruppences because he'd keep them for me.

From there he became the chef at Caulfield grammar near Elsternwick and worked there for a fair few years. Then a position came up at Shenton House in Hawthorn, where he became the caretaker and chef. This was another type of hostel but it was more like a motel with self-contained units. It was an old mansion in Kinkora Road with beautiful trees and a tennis court. It was used as a residence for doctors visiting from England. My dad ran the kitchen and would cook meals for the residents and there was a maid to help. I went there to visit when I was married with the kids and he would always make us a beautiful meal. Sometimes there were no residents so he wouldn't have anything to do apart from cooking for himself and the maid, and she would wash up. At lunchtime he would go to the Glenferrie Hotel and have two pots. Here he became friends with Mr. Valentine, a Hungarian artist who lived across the road. They called him Doctor Valentine. I don't know what happened to him.

People loved my dad because he was a happy, singing man. He was very sociable and wasn't shy in meeting any visiting dignitaries. Occasionally senior immigration department staff or

politicians would inspect the various hostels around Melbourne, and one of the latter who came to Shenton in the early seventies was Phillip Lynch, who was the Minister of Immigration. Walter Jona became friends with my dad; they used to have a drink together.

## Coming to St Albans

I was in Glenn Innes visiting my brother at the time when my dad was told he had to leave Bonegilla because they were gradually closing the place. My father rang Glenn Innes and told my brother to bring me to the Kolibas at St Albans. In preparing for our departure he threw out all my junk, including my comics and posters. If you had them today you could make a fortune selling them to collectors.

I came to St Albans when I was 14 or 15 and went to the high school in form three. That was probably about 1961 or '62. I was only there for about six months. One of the teachers was picking on me because of my hair style and because I was always out of uniform. I had slip-on Italian suede shoes that I had found in a car and my trousers were not the usual school ones but tailored ones from Hamptons. Mr. Torpey was the headmaster and was also interested in maths, but Mr. Pavlov was the best – if he knew you were interested in mathematics he'd pay attention to you. Mr. Torpey said "You need to get a haircut and why aren't you wearing black shoes?" So I told him that I was on my own because my mother had died when I was a baby and my father was living away – all the hardship stories – of course I knew all the right arguments by then – and he told me not to worry about it. He gave 10 shillings to get a haircut and Bob Koliba gave me a short back and sides and we used the money to buy chocolates and cigarettes.



At that time I was making little rings out of bolt nuts. Marzie Roszak, who was a little bit older, was working at the chroming place. I would make rings with little hearts and things like that and Marzie would chrome plate them for me at work and I was selling them at school. Everywhere I went I had a little file and I was working on the rings. Some people thought I was making knuckle dusters but I was only making individually-crafted fashion accessories.

The problem with being at the high school was that I was at that stage where I didn't want to conform to the dress and behaviour codes. I liked to dress in more style than the school uniform and having grown up with a lot of freedom I didn't like to be told what to do or how to do it.

## Bikies, Bodgies and Sharpies

First I was a bikie but I got sick of the bikies and became a bodgie. Then I became a sharpie. That was the era of the long hair and the sharpie walk. Do you remember that? It was more of a shuffle but you had to do it proper. I was barred from the Mariana Hall because of the way I dressed and walked. You had to wear the hand-made shoes by Kosmano of Collingood. Later when I was living with Eddie Sterling in Vule Street I didn't even have a cupboard but I had lots of shoes and clothes. My room had no cupboards and no nothing except a nail where I would hang my clothes and I must have had about fifteen pairs of shoes so they would be lying around on the floor.

I got sick of school and went looking for a job with Jimmy Jarosinski. Jimmy was a year older than me and already working but he wanted to change and we went to a few places looking for work in the factories. In Sunshine about Third Avenue on the way to the Tottenham Hotel there was a place called National Springs. Down that street was Plant Handling Equipment and the boss there was a tall Pommy guy who had been an officer in the British Army. It was a welding and press shop and Jimmy had welding experience but I didn't. Jimmy said he couldn't start straight away because he had to give a week's notice but I said I could start immediately. I had just turned 15 but I told them I was 18. Anyway, they put me on the guillotine and with lots of overtime I was earning about £8 per week, which was quite good money for a young lad like myself. About two weeks later my father rang to see how I was going at school and they told him I was no longer at

school. He wasn't happy with me because he was paying board to the Kolibas but seeing I wasn't at school he said I could pay my own board from now on.

I felt a bit guilty after a while because I was working hard but they were treating me well and I thought I would get caught out. I went to my boss, Mr. Thornley, and told him I wasn't 18 but would be turning 16 in two month's time. He said, "For being honest I'm going to give you a one pound rise and send you to technical school to become a sheetmetal worker." He'd stay behind and teach me how to use the micrometer and calibrate the machines. When I turned 17, I was foreman of the press and guillotine workshop.

## Staying with the Kolibas

When my father and I left Bonegilla he continued working as a chef and these were generally live-in positions. His first job after Bonegilla was at an old hostel for English migrants that was next to the Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne. I went and stayed with the Koliba family who had moved to St Albans in the 1950s.

My dad never came to live in St Albans but he would come and visit me at the Kolibas. Even when I was working in the factory in Sunshine my dad used to come from Hawthorn and bank my pay for me. I still get tears thinking about him, because he was my dad, my mum, and my best mate. I still go to the cemetery to visit his grave. My father ended up buying a block of land in Warrick Road North Sunshine with some money that he and I had scraped together and I ended up inheriting that block of land.



When I was about 18, I remember dad drinking with people like Ivan Koliba and the Hercelinskyjs. We knew the Kolibas because they were also in Bonegilla; the children were Bob, Daria and Christina, and they lived in Elizabeth Street. There were also Kolibas from Ardeer who attended the high school. Biskupski lived on the corner of Kate street, because when I came to holidays I would automatically hang around with Biskupski. He married Teresa Layden; they were further up from the corner in the brick house.

Then the company I was working for brought in the pallet racking from Canada. My mates were outside putting it all together while I was inside the factory, so I asked Mr. Thornley if I could also work on the shelving construction. At first he wanted me to continue where I was then agreed and eventually put me in charge of interstate installations. So I went all over Australia installing shelving. At that time they were doing the shelving for Coles New World supermarkets. I had two installations in New South Wales: one in Penrith and the other in Orange. I went by train to Sydney, caught the train to Penrith and did that job, and then caught a plane to Orange. It was winter and freezing so I wanted to get the job finished as quickly as possible. I was on my own and as far as getting a team of workers I was told to go to the local pub and recruit men there. There were two semi-trailer loads of shelving and I installed that pretty much on my own and the company was really pleased because the job was finished quickly. I booked a lot of overtime on that job but also got paid good bonuses so we were all happy. Mind you there were other times when I let the company down by not turning up for work after I'd had a night of drinking. I left work a few times and they always accepted me back. Now it's happening to me and I'm wondering why don't these young men turn up for work like they're supposed to? It's Karma. Kingfishers bought us out and after them it was Boral Cyclone. Old Archie was a Scottish guy who was a manager in the company and he was like a second father to me and every year for Christmas I bought him a bottle of something special. Old Archie lived and died in Croydon. He was a great manager and a great guy.

## Remembering Bonegilla

People mentioned my name in connection with Bonegilla because we had been there 12 years and had become institutionalised. I didn't think there was anything wrong with that.



In 2000 the Albury Museum, sponsored an exhibition for the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the migrant reception centre I was asked to become part of the official opening of the show that went around Australia. It was a touring exhibition that was called “From the Steps of Bonegilla.” They published a little book about it. At the reunion I caught up with people who I hadn’t seen in many years, including Caroline Guinn, Ted Egan and John Duncan, who had been high up in the camp hierarchy. Carolyn Guinn – her married name was Steadman - was the daughter of Colonel Guinn who had been the director of the camp from the mid fifties to the mid sixties.

In 2001 there was a Bonegilla Reunion Day organised by the Immigration Museum and I came across Paul Crowe, my former primary school teacher was also there with his wife, Margaret. We were on the same forum panel talking on the theme “What’s your story” which was organised by the SBS Front Up television program.

In 2001 I also gave a talk to a staff seminar for the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne. That was held at the Veneto Club in Bulleen and was part of the Federation centenary celebrations. They asked me to talk about my Bonegilla experience as a contribution to “immigration perspectives in exploring Australian history and culture.” It was like an in-service training for their staff.

That year I also lent my photo album to the state library so that they could make copies for their collection and link them to the Immigration Museum’s Bonegilla Hostel archive.

Much closer to home, in 2003 I was guest speaker for the Association of Ukrainians, St Albans, for a discussion and a BBQ at their hall in Alexina Street. This event was sponsored by the Victorian Multicultural Commission. Ukrainian immigrants were some of the early arrivals in St Albans after the war and they organised themselves pretty quickly. They bought a block of land on the corner of Alexina and Arthur streets in 1953 or 1954 and built clubrooms for social activities. It’s still there, though the church and the main community centre is in Essendon.

## Horse Racing

My father was a little gambler because he’d put 50 cents on the double whereas he always said I as a *durak* [idiot] because if I made a bit of money I didn’t know how to keep it. Even as a lad in the camp I always spent whatever money came my way. I loved buying records and things. When I was working and cashed up and visiting my brother in Glen Innes I would go dressed up in good suits and shoes. You can’t get that quality in a country town so I often left good clothing for him. I used to go to Collins Street to buy it. I wanted to have nice things rather than money in a bank doing nothing. Mr. Koliba also loved to have a bet and, just like my father, it was a little bet. My brother was a big gambler and worked for a bookmaker and SP, and that’s how I started.

The first horse I bet on was Mister Lou. I bet £5 pounds and won £50. Peter Bakos was the jockey; a little Hungarian immigrant. That win got me hooked and the fascination grew. How I started buying racehorses was back in 1995. Fred, my German neighbour, was selling his house and he had it on the market for 6 months and hadn’t sold it, so I said to him if I get this job I’ll buy your house. By that time I was working as an independent shelving contractor and I’d quoted \$100,000 for a big job installing shelving in Bourke Street so I was expecting some money. Would you believe the house sold before I got my money? That’s how I ended up with money to buy a racehorse.

The next house I wanted to buy my friend Sloko talked me out of it. There was three properties near the Anglican Church in East Esplanade that I could have bought, but I didn’t and that’s

history. I could have built lots of units there between the church and the alleyway. For a while I was trying to get Sloko interested in the horses. He would come with me to the tracks and the stables but he never took it up seriously. He found it exciting to be up there at 4 in the morning and see the jockeys and the trainers working. We'd be walking down there in the half-light and people would be asking "How are you Bonna?" because they knew me as Bonegilla Tom. It is exciting when the jockey comes back and says "I think it will win" because that's as close as you will ever really get to the horse's mouth.

Super Shaquille was my first horse, first starter to win three in town. I always said to Nick, my Ukrainian mate from West Footscray, that one day I'm going to win a race with my own horse at Flemington. We used to meet on a Saturday morning at the Royal, have a couple of pots, and then catch a taxi to Moonee Valley or Caulfield or wherever we were going that day. Nick is a businessman who now lives in Canada, leading quite a good life. He worked at Moreland's Real Estate. He met a girl from Canada and got into real estate over there; been retired for years, has a yacht, drives the best cars. I sent him a photo of my horse winning at Flemington to prove I had done it. I always said I was the poorest of owners, a battler from St Albans, but at least I beat some of the millionaires.

I've had horses win at Flemington, Sandown, Moonee Valley Caulfield and even Sydney. So I achieved my ambition with the horses, but I know you can't win money – it's a fluke. I owned my horses outright which meant I didn't have to argue with other part owners. These days I have a betting splurge now and again, but I treat it as a business which means I will take some risks but not stupid ones. These days I'm happy if I walk out without losing money, but often enough I win, so it's still a good experience. The more I win the more I bet, so I know you can end up losing a lot, which I have done. If I'd put all my betting money into real estate I'd have a lot of real estate by now. These days I put some money into shares; they go up and down but at least you don't lose all your money.

Super Shaquille won at Sandown and Moonee Valley the year that Doriemus won the Melbourne Cup [1995]. But they still got all my winnings back, because of course before long I ended betting all that money. I named my first racehorse "Bonegilla Tom" because of my good memories of the place and then discovered that many punters responded positively to the name. I guess they also had some good memories to recall. I bought that horse for \$60,000 as a yearling, raced it for a time locally, and ended up selling it to America where it also won some races. It was doing well here and was a good earner, having won a race at Caulfield [1997] and coming second in several other races. It won prize money of about \$95,000, which wasn't too bad for a five-year-old. It could have won a lot more except for the bleeding from the nostrils after racing. Unfortunately for me the horse was banned for life after a couple of such bleeding incidents. That's why it was sold to America, because over there they could treat the bleeding with a drug that was listed as illegal over here. It put in a good performance at Hollywood Park at 33 to 1, which was pleasing to hear.

Cinderella Cafe was another of my racers. I thought there were excellent possibilities with her because she was sired by Beau Zam, who had been a prolific winner. She was only a tiny horse and though she started well she didn't go on. There's a bit of a story behind the name.

## **The Cinderella Cafe**

When my father and I were at Bonegilla he would say he had some business he had to attend to in Wodonga. I was just a young lad at the time but I've always remembered the café that dad took me to, usually on a Saturday, when he went into town to settle his business deals, at a place called the Cinderella Café. I never really understood what these discussions were about, but that didn't worry me, because while he was at his meeting I would be looked after by the waitresses at the cafe, who would give me a glass of lemonade and kept me company until dad returned. I really enjoyed those outings because everyone was so friendly and I always looked forward to that glass of lemonade as a special treat. All that stopped when we moved away from Wodonga and for a while I really missed these little excursions into town.

Many years after dad passed away I was reminiscing about those nice memories and during some holidays I decided to visit Bonegilla to recapture a sense of those early days. The Bonegilla Reunion Festival was held in 1997 to celebrate the Reception Centre's 50th anniversary, and that was good enough as an excuse for me to go there as well.

Naturally enough, over those 50 years Wodonga had grown and neighbourhoods merged, so that nothing at all was familiar to me. I walked around the streets but couldn't find any sign of a Cinderella Café and even checking in the phone books wasn't a help. Nobody on the streets had heard of it, so it must have closed down a long time ago. In the end I decided to have one more try at the local pub, on the theory that pubs always have an old codger or two willing to reminisce about the good old days. Anyway, I did find an older guy having a beer and he seemed willing enough for me to start up a conversation. When I asked him if he'd ever been to the Cinderella Café, he looked at me rather oddly and asked why I wanted to know. So I explained how I had been there as a young lad with my father and was looking forward to another lemonade for old time's sake.

He just smiled and said it wasn't so much a café as a house of ill repute.

## Jack Eastgate

With regard to the horses, I became good friends with Jack Eastgate, who owned Beau Zam in partnership with Bart Cummings. Eastgate was a multi-millionaire and was the first person to win \$2 million in stake money, plus he sold the horse for \$5 million. His family was Eastgate Cabinets, and he said that after the war they were only making sixpence profit on each cabinet, but a million times that is a lot of money, as he told me. Jack's wife was from Scotland and her family owned one of the big whiskey distilleries. Eastgate had a stud farm up in Monegeeta.

How we became friends is that we were with the same horse trainer, Johnny Maher. When my horse Super Shaquille was on his second start at Sandown I went there to put some money on him because I knew he would win. When I saw the odds shortening unexpectedly I knew someone else was betting heavily and unfortunately I didn't get the best odds. Jack was a big punter and had a horse in the previous race and he usually followed the stable for potential winners, so he had backed my horse purely on speculation. We both made money on that race but I didn't make as much money as I could have if there were better odds. Naturally I made some inquiries but no one admitted passing on any tips to outsiders. A few weeks later Jack's horse was running at Moonee Valley as was mine and I saw Jack dressed up in a nice suit. He came up to me and said "Son, I can look you in the eye and say I did not back your horse. But you are invited to my farm any time you are out that way." I later said to Johnny Maher, the trainer, "Anyone who could look me in the face and say what he did is a bloody good liar," because he had backed it.



Anyway, we became really good friends. Beau Zam won eighteen of his starts so was a fantastic horse. Eastgate sold it to Japan for \$5m in the eighties; that was a lot of money. He had this 200-acre farm with horses at Monegeeta. When I first went there his second wife, Elizabeth, was very nice in making me welcome. It turns out her family was behind Grants Whiskey in Scotland. They were multi-millionaires but they were both very down to earth. Eastgate met the Queen in Canberra when Beau Zam beat Bonecrusher in the Queen Elizabeth II Bicentennial

Stakes [8 May 1988]. He had lots of trophies because he had a long history of horse racing. He loved a bit of repartee in connection with the horses and we had fun at the races because of that. He often called me 'son' when we were talking and when we went to places like Ballarat he would sign me into the members' area as his son. If I wanted to stir him up a bit I'd respond by asking "Can you lend me ten grand, Dad?" If I'd taken my jokes a bit too far or they were too obscure he'd pause and say: "Are you taking the Mickey?"

Jack had a lot of property investments which he had accumulated after the war. He also had the family furniture business, so he died a winner. I would visit him in hospital when he was ailing and I'd also visit his wife who was being treated for cancer. I also went to his funeral, and have missed his friendship and company ever since.

## 2013

I've been in my current home in St Albans for the past 30 years. Fred Drillich used to live next door and we'd have a cup of tea together. We'd been neighbours for twenty years and then I discovered that he'd been the supervisor of Block 19 in Bonegilla when I was just a little kid. To think that I used to get on the bike and tease him because he was a supervisor. Isn't it funny that we'd been neighbours for 20 years and didn't recognise that we'd been in the same hostel so many years earlier?



I still bet on the horses and have a big bet every now and again. You can win a fair amount but you can be a bit greedy. You win something and think you will repeat it but you can lose it just as quickly. These days I put some of the winnings into shares, which is less risky if you are careful. You can't make real money out of horses unless you are very lucky or very rich. I know because I tried. I had seven horses and six winners. I named one of my horses "Bonegilla Tom" and found that a lot of punters backed it because they could relate to the name. Another one I named "Cinderella Cafe" but not too many people would have known what I was referring to.

This old Ukrainian or Polish lady said to me that I would have a very long life. I've always been lucky because I could have got into a lot of trouble over the years but I didn't. It's true what they say: as one door closes another one opens. I am more of a leader than a follower, by which I

mean that I like being my own boss and working in my own way rather than being ordered around. I started my own business 40 years ago and it is true that one door closes and another one opens.

I have been working as an independent contractor installing shelving and shop fittings for many years. I work wherever required, all over Australia. I get together a team and install shelving over a few days up to a few weeks depending in the size of the job. It's hard work though relatively well paid, but it is intermittent so you also have plenty of time to do other things in your life. I always have ideas on the go. Thailand has business opportunities and I've been travelling there over several years just looking around to see what is available.

I went to China about 2004 to see if I could set up a business there. I had established some contacts via the internet but wanted to see it personally. While I was there I came across a punter who was familiar with the horse racing industry in Australia and had even bet on one of my horses. It is a small world.

My dad died in 1978 at the age of 63. He started experiencing a lot of pain in the late 'seventies and it turned out to be bowel cancer. He must have had it for a while but he didn't know it and ended up dying pretty quickly. After my father died, Mr. Walter Jona, who was the Member for Hawthorn and Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, sent his condolences and a wreath to the funeral. I had this beautiful letter of appreciation from Immigration for his work there, how dad made everyone feel welcome when they came to Australia.

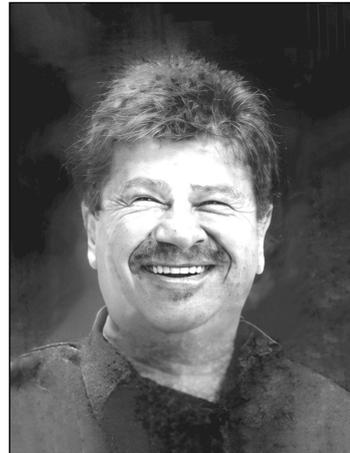
I will be 66 soon but still do shelving installations for Target stores and can outwork the young blokes. Why retire? I'm still earning good money. When we are in the old people's home all there



is to talk about is our money and our property. But I have lots of memories to talk about and money can't buy you that.

I also developed bowel cancer in 1998 but my operation was successful. These days my health is reasonable and I follow the same advice I gave my friend George Plakic, who was a big Yugoslav guy, so muscular and strong he was like a bull, but he still came down with major health problems.

My advice is simple: "Give Up" never won a race, and "Think Big" won two Melbourne Cups. So be positive and think big.



**Tom Tscherepko, 2013**

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This story is based on an interview with Tom Tscherepko in 2013.  
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