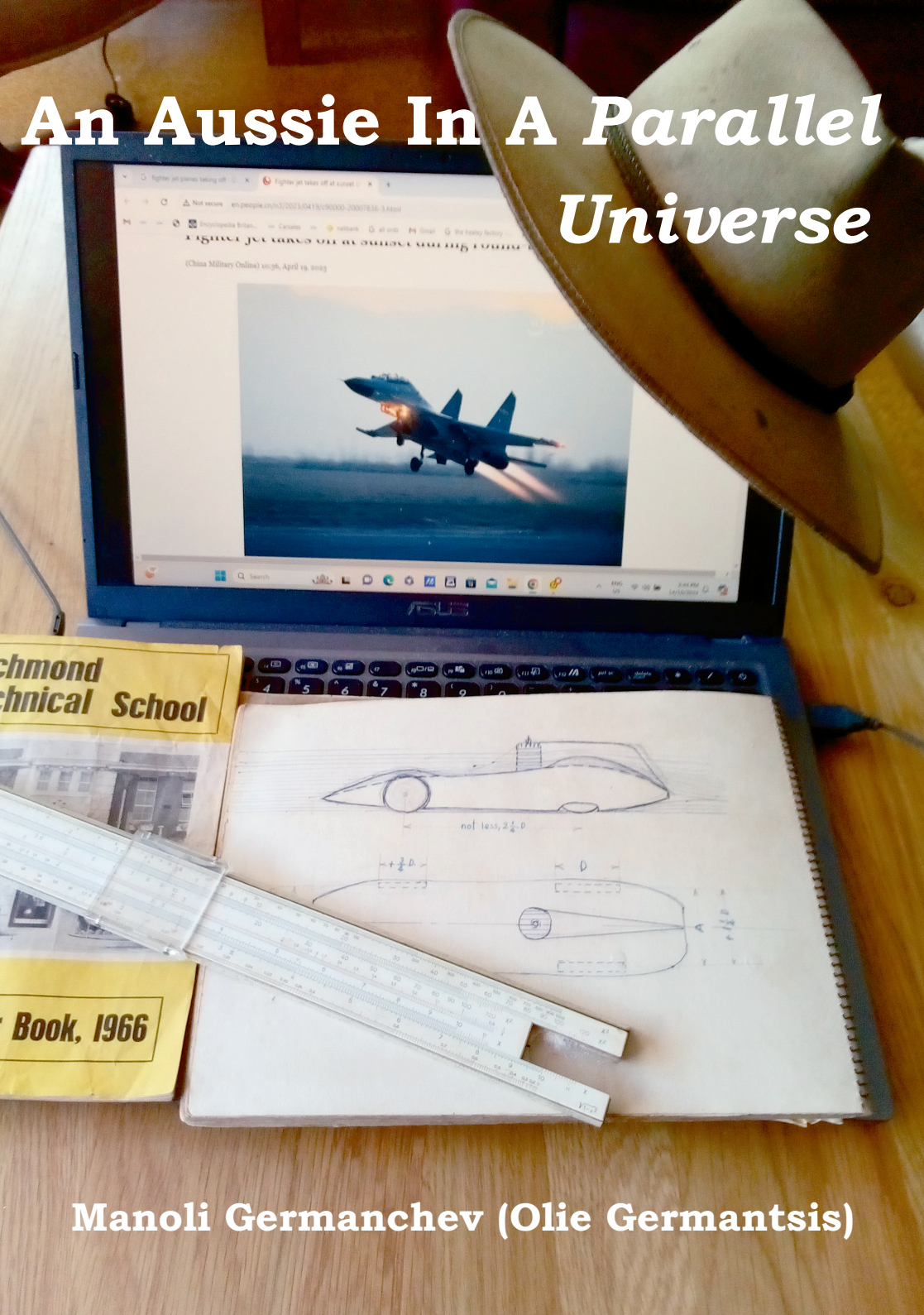
An Aussie In A *Parallel Universe*



Manoli Germanchev (Olie Germantsis)

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Introduction

October is the middle month of autumn in the northern hemisphere, which includes Macedonia, where I was born. The climate is as calm and steady as the Mediterranean Sea. You can rest assured that there won't be a sudden gust of wind or unexpected rain, until the blistering winds bring the snow to our land towards the end of November. The temperature during the autumn days is warm without being uncomfortably hot and it stays like that until the annual harvest is picked, packed and stored away for the long winter.

Autumn is the best season of the year, mainly because that's when our land rewards us for our hard work during the growing seasons. Our land gives us the grains, the corn, the vegetables and feeds our animals all year round, except in winter. The *levada* (hayfield) provides the hay which we store in our mud-brick shed to feed it to the animals in winter. The threshed wheat and barley are poured into the *umberry* (silos).

The corn cobs are peeled and laid bare on the natural slate in our back yard to dry. The dry corn kernels are separated from the cob and are milled into fine corn flour that provides a good meal for our pig and supplements our meals when needed. I remember eating *Kachamak*, a chunky flour meal that looks like mashed potatoes but is yellow, like baked pumpkin, and it tastes like corn.

The grapes have been picked, crushed and the grape juice is poured into wooden barrels so that it will ferment

into wine. The wine will be rationed throughout the long winter and each sip will remind us of the value of hard work during spring and summer. Those people who have a distillery and the knowhow will distill the *comeety* (crushed grape skins) into *rakia* (clear alcoholic drink).

Finally, the delicate farm produce is sorted. The different fruit, cucumbers and green tomatoes are pickled and placed in sealed jars. The excess apples are not pickled, they are left to dry on shelves, together with the nuts and pumpkin seeds, in our *easber* (cellar). The bountiful strawberries are picked with their stems intact, placed in wooden crates amongst loose straw and transported to Germany in a refrigerated van.

Few wealthy families in Germany will savour the exotic Mediterranean fruit in exchange for a few dollars. We would exchange the money from our strawberries for rice and kerosine; the things we can't grow or make.

I, as a young carefree child, thought that we lived in the Garden of Eden. The image of the Garden of Eden was further reinforced in my mind when I was wandering in the V-shaped narrow trench between two rows of our strawberry field. The water stream that was watering the strawberries was diverted a long time ago, leaving fine dry soil in the trench. As I was walking barefoot along the trench I could feel and see puffs of fine soil between my toes. Every now and then I would bend over and pluck a juicy strawberry and put it in my mouth as if it were a lollipop. I didn't know then and I couldn't envisage that I,

too, would be plucked from our village in a similar way that our strawberries were plucked.

The Garden of Eden was small and it got even smaller when the Greek Government stole some of our land and gifted it to the Greek migrants from Turkey. Now, the reduced land couldn't possibly feed four families if my grandfather stayed on his plot of land and if his three sons had married and if they all had families of their own. And if all of them stayed there, hoping to live like Adam and Eve, they would have been bitterly disappointed. The five-acre plot would have been depleted in no time at all.

Something had to be done! The government didn't help and it didn't want to help. In fact, the Greek government wanted to get rid of us after that horrible Greek Civil War. The Macedonians, passive as they are, have suffered the most of all the people living in the Balkans region throughout the Ottoman occupation and beyond. Our people are still suffering and hence they have learned from that suffering how to survive, no matter what. The solution to their survival and hopefully the path to prosperity was: MIGRATION.

My father migrated to Australia in 1952 with assistance from his older brother, who had come here a few years earlier. With a lot of hardship, dad established a starting base for a new life for his family in a new country, in this different part of the world.

In October of 1959 my grandfather arranged for our strawberries to be transported to a new, but similar country

in the same hemisphere. Early February in 1960 my father plucked his family, like he was plucking strawberries from the small subsistence-style land, and arranged the transport of his “strawberries” to a different country in the opposite hemisphere.

Putting aside the gradual changes to the landscape that I saw on route to Australia, the visual impact on arrival in Melbourne was surreal. There was a stark difference between our village, situated in a picturesque rural setting, to the industrial compact suburb of Richmond in Melbourne. I instantly thought that this is what a parallel universe would look like.

I still mentally revisit the moment when I first set eyes on our tiny house in Kent Street, Richmond. The houses were identical and were packed next to each other on what appeared to be an infinite street. The sort of infinite image one sees in a mirror that is facing another mirror.

Now, with the advantage of hindsight and sixty years of accumulated knowledge behind me, is the time to take you back to that time and place in Richmond, and to tell you my story. My story is the same story as that of many other migrants who have gone through a “transition”. A geographical transition, an environmental transition, an industrial transition, and most importantly who are still undergoing a cultural transition. Every migrant’s story is the same, only the details are different. I hope you will find my details interesting.

I Learned The Meaning Of The Word “Mate” And I Met Some Sheilas

Sixty years ago, Kent Street, Richmond was a wide paved street, packed footpath to footpath with small houses, workers' cottages about 5 metres wide by 15 metres long. There was no room for trees to be planted, or for gardens to grow, no bare soil to grow vegetables, no creeks or rivers for fishing in. Instead, there were polluting factories amongst the houses, there was the odd small car on the street, the odd “Morris 10”, the “Ford Prefect” and such. I was expecting to see vast fields of wheat, fields of corn. I thought there would be orchards and strawberry fields everywhere around us. At four o’clock in the afternoon I was expecting to see a herd of cows with their clanking bells coming down Kent Street for their daily milking. Followed by a flock of sheep bleating behind the cows, and to see the exhausted farmer or a shepherd dragging his tired feet in his muddy boots. I saw none of the above, I saw only rows of houses with presumably people living in them.

Compare the tiny houses of Richmond, made out of wood, others of brick and some out of bluestone, and all of them lined up like soldiers on asphalted streets, to our house in our village, Mala. Picture the open fields surrounding our white-washed house made out of metamorphic rocks that is set on approximately five acres of productive land. We had a *livada* (hay field) for our animals, an orchard for our fruit needs, a large vegetable garden and

a strawberry field for us. All of this was bordered on one side by a creek, bubbling with sparkling spring water.

Our farm animals provided the proteins and the dairy food. The land provided the greens for us to eat. One could instantly see how we were able to live off the land. Over the years I saw and I learned how we milked the sheep and the cows. And how we made cheese and butter from their milk. How once a year we slaughtered our pig and stored its pork in a barrel full of salty brine. We made leek sausages with the pig's intestines and we played soccer with the pig's pumped up blader.

There was life all around the house in summer. In winter the life moved inside the house where we could stay warm by the wood stove that was stoked by firewood that we gathered from the surrounding forests. We told stories, sang songs and at other times we played cards, while we were sipping the wine that we produced from our vineyards. An ideal life, in an idyllic setting. Until it was ruined by that unnecessary Greek Civil War during 1945-1949.

In our small house in Kent Street, Richmond, there was no sign of food production. There was food stored in the fridge. Enough food to feed us for one week at a time, and then what? So I wondered, with good reason, how do those people in their tiny houses in Kent Street survive? Where do they get their food from? Kent Street and the adjacent Buckingham Street have as many houses and therefore as many people living in them as my village in Macedonia had.

Yet the life-form that exists here in Kent Street must be surviving on no apparent food or energy. They must be on a different food/energy source, they are in a parallel universe for sure.

From this perspective, to me at least, Richmond if not all of Australia looked like a parallel and a completely different universe to the one that contains Macedonia. But I was wrong to make that original assumption. After closer scrutiny I realised that I found myself in a densely populated suburb of a relatively large city compared to the smaller town of Lerin (Lerin is the closest town to our village Mala in Macedonia). The food must have been grown somewhere else and must have been delivered to those tiny houses, I thought to myself. I was comparing apples with oranges. I wasn't in a parallel universe. I was in a different location on earth, in a different country, in a city that was more developed than our village. Here they have electricity in their homes, they have running water and they have flushing toilets.

Early in the morning when I left our house to complete my morning newspaper round in East Melbourne, I could hear the clip clop of the Clydesdale horse pulling a milk cart that was delivering bottles of milk at the front door of most houses in our street. People do things differently here, they don't milk cows in their mini back yards, they do it somewhere else, I thought to myself. Richmond is more advanced than my village. I didn't step into a parallel universe, I stepped into the future.

In due time, I observed more features around Richmond, features such as electricity poles, letter boxes, and that the houses were numbered in sequential order. Unlike in Mala where the houses were not numbered and the streets didn't have names. And now I felt that I had to explore this new country of ours in greater detail. And this is where the story of getting to know my new country and to meet my fellow country people begins in earnest. I have to use my skills of observation (I love observing and analysing things) to learn how to exist in this new and simultaneously challenging and interesting country; a country full of potential.

It wasn't long before I found the farmers' market in Gleadell Street where residents could buy some of their food and where dad bought vegetables, fruit, chickens, eggs and other household commodities to sustain us for a week. Now, my anxiety about the food supply to Kent Street eased. Dad took me to that farmers' market one Saturday morning to do our shopping. There, as well as buying our weekly needs, I learned that dad had lots of friends and I learned a new word.

Almost everyone at the market called out to dad "Hey mate", "how is it going mate?", "thank you mate", "see you later mate". I asked dad what this new-to-me word "mate" meant. He said it means "friend". But he was quick to point out that if someone doesn't know your name, he will call you mate even though he may not be your friend. Well, a lot of people didn't know dad's name and those who knew it couldn't pronounce it. How could anyone of the locals

living in Richmond then know how to pronounce the name "Konstantinos"? Eventually, dad changed his name to "Jim" for convenience's sake, as many other people have done before him. So, everyone who didn't know dad's name called him "mate".

A lot of migrants had pseudo names for the Anglo-Saxon population. The Macedonians went a step further. For example, my father had four names, "*Mitre*" in Macedonian, "*Konstantinos*" in Greek, "Jim" for the Aussies and "Mate" for those who didn't know any of his names.

A visit to the farmers' market in Gleadell Street was a regular Saturday shopping day ritual where locals bought their weekly food supplies. But more importantly it was a meeting place for the newly arrived migrants, who started to congregate together into a group of people of the same language and of similar customs. And it wasn't long before Macedonians from nearby suburbs heard about the market's low-priced produce and came for their weekly bargain shopping. They exchanged names and addresses and eventually a subset of a multicultural community was created consisting mainly of Macedonians and other Eastern European migrants like Greeks, Croatians and even one Ukrainian family.

In Kent Street alone, in addition to our family which consisted of dad, mum, twelve-year-old me, my ten-year-old brother and my seven-year-old sister, there was a Macedonian family with two girls and a boy living opposite our house. Diagonally across our house lived uncle Vangel

and his family. Next to Vangel's house lived his in-laws who had a widowed daughter. Vangel also had his sister and brother-in-law renting in his house. There was no shortage of people for me to socialize with while I was waiting to start my education in this very different country to the one that I was born in.

During the day when most members of my social group were working, I had free time to explore Richmond and its environs. At 4.00 pm I would be back at home. I would sit on the long bench seat in the passageway near the open front door of our tiny house. I would wait for the school kids and my uncle and my parents to come home. One day at about 4.00 pm an unexpected visitor came through the front door of our house.

Everyone has a story about the girl next door. Well, in my case there were several girls in close proximity to our house. There were three girls in the house on the left of our house. There was a girl in the house on the right. Two directly across the road from our house. And one girl living in the second storey house diagonally across the road from our house.

And then there was the girl who made all the other girls run to the nearest beauty salon for a makeover. This girl lived in another street and she walked past our house once a week on a Wednesday at precisely 4.30 pm. I made a mental note of her cameo appearance that took place every Wednesday at precisely 4.30 pm. She was worth waiting for, outside our house, just to see her walk past me. She wore a

long light-blue coat with dignity and poise. Her name was Stephanie, as revealed by her parents. She walked with her parents for safety, because her radiant beauty demanded security from the riff raff in Richmond. I saw Stephanie three times and then she and her parents disappeared. People of means, taste, ambition and in this case, of extraordinary beauty, moved away from Richmond. Richmond was a stepping stone to better places for most migrants.

Back to the other girls. Well, there were sheilas galore around our house.

For me, the theme of the girl next door was played in a reverse order. I was the boy next door. The one who was the unfortunate victim of an older girl who lived in the house to the left of ours. Her hormones were on fire, she was looking for anyone with two legs, and there I was, with both of my legs seated on a long bench seat in our passage-way. The front door was open, as it was a hot day. The open door allowed me to count cars that went past the house (I will explain the reason for counting cars later).

All of a sudden the girl next door came into the house and sat beside me and positioned her considerable bulk on the opposite side of the bench seat's leg. This created a potentially dangerous situation if I were to stand up and to move away. The bench seat would surely topple over, like a see-saw does when one person gets off it. I was a captured victim. And I can tell you it definitely wasn't Stephanie who captured me. This girl wanted to communicate with me, but

she didn't speak my language and conversely I didn't know her language. It wasn't like in one of those Tarzan movies where the savage learns English and starts to communicate within minutes. Many minutes went by without any verbal communication between us. I started to feel uncomfortable and I felt threatened. I slowly slid away from the heavy girl. She moved towards me without touching me. Now, the physical language was about to start. We kept this you-move-I-move game going until we were both within the two legs of the bench seat. And therefore it was safe for me to stand up and leave her sitting alone on the bench seat without the seat toppling over. I stood up and I went into the lounge room and waited until she left. I skilfully avoided a potentially embarrassing situation.

That next-door girl had two younger sisters. They were proper blondes with natural honey-coloured straight hair and smooth skin, but they were always in a bad mood and they never looked directly at me. At their moodiest time, I saw them both sitting on top of the low roof of the back of their small house. They were sitting in a way that showed what boys wanted to see. As I was gazing at them they told me to go away in no-uncertain terms. Perhaps the pretty blonde girls didn't share the same father as their older sister who had sat beside me, going by their vastly different physical appearances?

In front of their house there was a big car. A Ford Fairlane that was leaving pools of oil on the footpath and it was constantly under repairs. Eventually the whole family moved away from that neglected and dilapidated house.

Then Richmond started to gradually clean its image by virtue of that and other dysfunctional families moving away and those smelly factories closing down and being replaced by apartments. After all, Richmond was boarded by some desirable suburbs such as East Melbourne on its left, by South Yarra on its south and by Kew, Hawthorn and Balwyn on its right. East Melbourne will feature in another chapter as this is where I spent a considerable amount of time working and observing how the elite lived. But, during the first five years in Australia, we lived in a pitiful part of Richmond, as indicated by the dysfunctional family with their broken car next door to us.

Later on, we moved to a bigger house in a better part of Richmond and our living conditions improved enormously. My brother and I had a separate bedroom from our sister for a start. More importantly, the second house had a shed in the backyard with its door facing the back lane. Now we had a workplace to repair and maintain our cars. Most of the dirty work on the cars was carried out in the lane. Dad had room to distill *rakia* (an alcoholic spirit made from grapes). Mum had a basic kitchen in the shed where she would do her heavy-duty cooking so as not to leave any lingering smells in her main kitchen inside the house. The main kitchen was kept in an immaculate condition for the visitors to admire and for mum to show how well the kitchen and the whole house was maintained. This additional outdoor kitchen is a continuation of a way of life we had back in Macedonia where we cooked most of

the meals over an open fire in a specially built *kujna* (kitchen).

Now, let's go back to the days of the old school yard. Remember the song by Cat Stevens and the lyrics about the school yard? Well, the next chapter will be about the good old days. There, I will describe some interesting events that had taken place during the time I spent in the old school yards.

The Days Of The Old School Yard

Schools are great places for learning, but learning is not the only thing that takes place in schools and learning is not confined to the classroom. You do stuff in the classroom, stuff like read, write stories, do sums and so on. The important learning takes place outside the classroom, particularly in the school yard. In the school yard one learns, develops, makes life-long friends, matures and eventually becomes an individual and a unique person.

Starting with my first school, the primary school in Mala, and looking back at it sixty years later, I see it in a different way. Now, it seems as if the whole process of learning and socialising there was a waste of time, sad, pathetic and confusing. But there and then it was seriously important, it was a great achievement for a student to graduate from the highest and the only school in the village. The school's main educational goals were to teach students to read, write letters and to carry out basic arithmetic operations such as additions, subtractions, multiplications and divisions. The primary school in Mala adequately provided these basic needs. Primary school education was sufficient for a subsistence-style life in a rural village. Not many students went on to secondary education, mainly due to financial reasons and the lack of employment opportunities.

After the wars in Europe, there was a lost generation of people who missed out on a primary school education. Not able to read or write, old people would sit outside their

homes with a newspaper in their hands pretending that they could read it. People were ashamed and felt inadequate that they were illiterate.

There is an old tale regarding the illiterate generation. An old man is seated outside his house holding a newspaper upside-down and, yes, pretending to read it. A young man points out to the old man and says:

"*Dedo* (Grandpa), you are holding the newspaper upside-down."

The old man answers back. "Yes, I know. I have read the paper in the right position so many times and now I want to see if I can read it upside-down."

I didn't spend a lot of time in the school yard in my village because it was wet and cold for most of the year. For three or more months of the school year the school yard was covered with snow. I do remember the marching, parade formation and rehearsals of speeches in the school yard in preparation for the end-of-school assembly. The assembly was to be held in Lerin and attended by all of the regional schools. The boys wore shorts and the girls wore short dresses and I remember how excited the boys were to see a bit of flesh above the girls' knees. I vaguely remember the seven kilometre march to Lerin in July 1959 for that end-of year ceremony. I led our school whilst carrying the school's flag with great pride, as I was dux of our school.

Most of my knowledge about natural concepts is intuitive and it comes from observations of everything that

went on outside the classroom. I spent more time observing, thinking about possible explanations, and asking questions about the way things are and sometimes experimenting with objects than I spent time learning in the classroom. This approach prepared me well for my educational training in Australia, where I managed to do well with minimal study. One example of learning by observation which appears paradoxical is that an icicle is as strong as a piece of rock that's equal in size and shape. And yet the icicle melts in your hands while the rock doesn't. "Why is this so?" I wondered.

A year later, at the start of September of 1960, I was enrolled in North Richmond Primary School where the school yard was accessible all year round. Most of my initial learning took place in the school yard.

North Richmond Primary School was a stone's throw away from our house. I walked there every school day for eighteen months. I was enrolled in September 1960 because dad mistakenly thought that the school year started early in September, as it does in Europe. I graduated, well, I finished my primary education in December 1961. As a result of my late enrollment and having to repeat grade 6, I was two school years behind my peers. But I wasn't worried about being a late school starter, and fortunately this turned out to be beneficial for me, as you will see later on.

For me, most of the interesting activities like games, socialising, playing practical jokes and, believe it or not, learning English took place outside the school classrooms,

mainly in the school yard. I dreaded going into the classroom because initially I couldn't understand a word the teachers were saying. When I was in the classroom, I entertained myself by watching the young female teacher prancing around the classroom in her pleated tartan skirt. The skirt was pinned by one safety pin half way up her thigh and she would spin around every now and then to make her skirt spread out like a cone. She thought that made her look pretty. I can't remember hearing her speak in the classroom. If she did speak, then I didn't understand a word she said. For me, the school yard was my favourite place. In the school yard I learned basic English words like: yes, no, hello, goodbye and so on.

And my teacher was a fellow student by the name of Russell Morris. Yes, that Russell Morris, the one who in 1969 released a chart-topping song titled The Real Thing. Russell was literally the "real thing" and an entertainer as well, even then, in 1961, in the school yard of North Richmond Primary School.

Russell found the sounds of Greek words fascinating and he would constantly ask me how to say things in Greek. With Russell we translated many words from English to Greek together.

I can't boast and say that I was Russell's best friend because everyone in the school liked him. He had many friends, particularly a boy named Franz Kraus. Franz was fixated by Russell, he stood motionless looking at Russell entertaining his school mates, not by singing, but by his

personality and by his persona. I was fascinated by Franz, by how absorbed he was by Russell's humanity; they were great mates.

And there was another Morris in the school. Morris was his Christian name, I didn't know his surname. But this other Morris was completely opposite in character to Russell Morris. This other Morris was arrogant, he insisted that we call him "Morrie". All of these mixed names, where a name can be used as a Christian or as a surname and can be shortened confused me. And then there were the ethnic names with their complicated spelling that made learning the English language difficult for me. There were kids of several ethnic backgrounds, all of them getting on together with no antagonism, no bullying, all happy as Larry.

There was no racial discrimination, even by Mrs Kowalski who ran the milk bar directly opposite the school. She tolerated the kids pushing and shoving in order to enter into her milk bar. Mrs Kowalski made the most amazing meatballs that many kids always bought from her at lunchtime. Kids didn't want to miss out on Mrs Kowalski's delicious meatballs, thus shoving in order to buy some before she sold out of them.

She would serve everyone and anyone without discrimination including the boy of an Italian background. If he would go to her shop. But no, the boy of the Italian background had a better lunch arrangement than the other kids.

The Italian mother of the Italian boy came to school every lunchtime and fed her son a hot home-cooked meal, followed by a glass of red wine. He dined under the peppercorn tree, near the school fence, until one day he and his mother were spotted by the teachers on yard duty. Two male teachers were always on yard duty and they spent all of the lunch time standing on the outside staircase landing that was situated on the second floor and at the edge of the school building. This afforded them a 270 degree view of the school yard. These teachers, whilst enjoying their hot cup of tea, saw the covert feeding activity. The teachers finished dipping their Teddy Bear biscuits in their tea, drank the hot tea. And then they walked up to Mrs Ferugio where she was dining her son under the peppercorn tree and politely explained to her.

“Here in Australia, we don’t give wine to the children, Mrs Ferugio,” said one of the teachers.

Mrs Ferugio understood what was said to her. “Oh, sorry, OK, I understand,” she said in an Italian accent.

Mrs Ferugio packed up her son’s lunch and left the school. Next day she appeared again with the hot home-cooked meal, but this time with a drinking glass and a bottle of cold beer.

The Big School

The big school was actually a small school, and it was linked to the bigger school that was physically smaller, but big in reputation. Let me explain this “big school” label. In “Macedonian colloquialism” the big school is the secondary school as compared to the primary school (the small school). So I was enrolled to go to the big school (a secondary school) by the name of Richmond Technical School which was linked to the Senior Richmond Technical School (the motor mechanics apprentice school), which was smaller in size and in student numbers. So in Macedonian colloquialism I went to the big school.

Dad and mum were happy for me to go to a big school, as they didn’t have the opportunity to go to a big school themselves because of the wars in Europe. Mum and dad’s contemporaries didn’t have the opportunity to go to a big school either. I was happy to go to a technical school, where I would learn how things worked and how to make things. And my primary school teacher, who by now was wearing a different coloured tartan skirt, was also happy because I had taken her advice in going to a technical school.

She advised me to go to a technical school one day after she saw one of my drawings, and because of that she decided that I was good with my hands. One day I drew a Christmas scene on her classroom’s blackboard which she left there for the last three months of the school year because she thought it was so good. It was at this time that I heard her speak for the first time and she said to me:

"You should go to Richmond Technical School, because you are good with your hands."

It wasn't her advice that made me go to the technical school. I wanted to go there in order to learn how things work and to make things. It seems that everyone was happy for me to go to the big school.

But I had a slight suspicion about a rumour that I heard about the tech school. A rumour that might be true and I was anxious about how I was going to face it all by myself on my first day at school. The rumour was that the new students to the technical school were initiated by having their heads dunked in the school's toilet bowls by the big boys. Fortunately, and coincidently for me, prior to going to Richmond Tech I had an experience that trained me and prepared me on how to defend myself and how to cope against first-day school initiations.

One day when I was crossing the side street on my way to the local milk bar I came across a boy in the middle of that street. He was carrying a bottle of milk. Milk came in glass bottles then and the bottles were capped with a thin foil of aluminium. This particular boy was dressed in a brand-new cowboy suit. He wore his cowboy hat swung behind his head, he was wearing a small jacket with fringe leather trimmings, chaps over his trousers, and looking all the way down towards his feet I could see that he wore cowboy boots with stirrups fixed onto them. One could not miss the shiny silver plastic pistols in their holsters strapped around his waist. His left hand was hovering over the pistol

grip while the right hand was holding the bottle of milk. He looked like a character straight out of the Bonanza television series. He could have easily been mistaken for Little Joe Cartright.

Two thoughts came to my mind. One thought was who in Richmond could afford to buy such an expensive looking outfit for a young boy. The second thought was how easily young children are influenced by what they see on television, and are willing to re-enact what they see. In retrospect I was wrong about the first thought. I now know that Richmond and other inner-city suburbs, like Clifton Hill and particularly Carlton, were developing into wealthy, separate cosmopolitan pockets of Melbourne. These suburbs were inhabited by people from different places of the world who had useful skills, abilities and social standings. And some of them had large wallets full of money. There was a great diversity of residents in Richmond who ranged from the disadvantaged and the downtrodden migrants like our family, who were living in workingmen's cottages such as those in Kent Street, to the well-to-do businessmen living on Richmond Hill who were rubbing shoulders with yet a higher class of people living just across Hoddle Street in East Melbourne. So, yes, there were people who could afford to buy "Little Joe" his fancy outfit.

But "Little Joe" behaved in a nasty way that day on that side street. As we crossed paths half way into the street, he dropped his bottle of milk which instantly broke and splashed the milk onto his shiny cowboy boots. He accused me of smashing his bottle and without waiting for an

explanation from me, he started swinging those eager little hands of his at me. I placed my outstretched hand on top of his head and stopped him from advancing towards me, and thus I avoided every swing that he directed at me. Meanwhile my uncle Vangel, who lived diagonally across the road and who was home early from work that day, saw the altercation and shouted in Macedonian:

"*Abre oodreo naza.*" ("Come on, hit him back.")

"But he hasn't hit me yet, uncle," I replied.

After uncle's menacing call the altercation ceased and "Little Joe" walked away without crying over his spilled milk.

Now I was ready to go to my new big school and see what I could learn in the school yard. I entered the school ground through the wrong entrance, "the apprentices" entrance. This was a risky move where the apprentices who were fully grown adults would tease the junior kids to tears. I was almost disappointed that there was no confrontation. I reached the junior tech's school yard where my friend Socrates and four other kids from North Richmond Primary School were standing around and were waiting for something weird or something unexpected to happen to them. Nothing happened, in fact nothing bad happened for the next three years. Richmond Technical School seemed to be a very docile place.

The school was a reflection of Richmond itself; it was docile for most of the time. But every now and then that

pent-up and self-contained tension would burst into a verbal and at times into a physical release of anger.

Kent Street and the surrounding streets of this inner-city workingman's suburb were inhabited by a mixture of people. Some of low socioeconomic backgrounds, others with dysfunctional families and some war-traumatized men, a few misplaced aristocrats and all from many different ethnic backgrounds.

Richmond Technical school was the most appropriate school for this varied suburb that had its specific challenges. The school was offering academic and vocational opportunities for the children of the residents of this varied community. And it was staffed by capable, enthusiastic and interesting teachers. I felt at home at Richmond Tech. In no time at all a close-knit group of boys from different ethnic backgrounds was formed. Olie from Macedonia, Socrates from Greece, Mario from Italy, Carlos from Spain, Carmelo from Italy, Karl from Germany, Vasyl from Ukraine and of course some other children with English backgrounds. We studied together, we played together and we made things together. Making things and learning will be covered in another chapter, so now let's go back to the schoolyard antics where every now and then the odd skirmish would take place.

One day during my year 10, in the middle of the school yard, one of the Ditty tween brothers approached me. Slightly behind him, stood a large figure in the shape of a boy that overshadowed Ditty. Ditty was looking at me with

his chin raised and turned slightly towards me. Ditty uttered the words from the corner of his twisted mouth.

"Are you looking for a fight, mate?"

This was reminiscent of how Squizzy Taylor would have extorted money from his victims in his crime territories, which included Richmond, during the 1930s. For a period of several years Squizzy Taylor terrorized Richmond in a similar way that Al Capone terrorised Chicago. You may care to look up the history of Squizzy Taylor.

I knew the answer to Ditty's question and it was "You and what army?"

Well, he did have an army, an army of five Ditties in the shape of that body guard behind him. So I didn't answer him, and that left him puzzled. I don't think Ditty meant any malice; it was his way of asking for acceptance amongst his peers. The Ditty incident was one example of how troubled kids sorted out their problems. Kids had personal problems and they didn't know how to cope with them in the school environment. And this was one way how they released some of their pent-up tension.

Another unrelated but deeply concerning incident was when a boy stabbed Mr Miller, the history teacher, with a knife. The teacher was not injured, as the knife didn't penetrate his jacket. This was yet another release of pent-up tension by a student who couldn't cope with the school's demands and didn't like history.

Mr Miller was an innocent victim of the stabbing incident, he was at the wrong place at the wrong time. It takes a brave person to teach history in a boys-only technical school. But next year, two adventurous and brave young ladies chose to teach social studies and history at the staunch boys-only school. This will be covered in greater detail later.

Learning takes place outside the school yard as well as outside school hours. The next story illustrates this and it includes a car and an Italian mother dispensing grappa instead of red wine. And Ditty makes a surprise appearance again. This story takes place one Saturday afternoon, a non-school day, in Buckingham Street, so it was outside the school yard and outside school hours.

It was late Saturday afternoon. I was in year 11 by now and I was old enough to drive a car. A car that I had bought with the money I had earned from various jobs that I had before school, after school and on Saturday mornings. One Saturday afternoon my 16 year old brother was behind the wheel of my Volkswagen Beetle and I was teaching him to drive it. We were at an intersection, when unexpectedly a police car drove in front of us and the policemen saw us; two teenagers in a Beetle. I saw the police car make a U turn and I told my brother to drive across the intersection, to pull over to the left side of the street and there we would switch seating positions in the car. The policemen caught us in the process of swapping the driving position.

“Okay you two, who was driving the car?” asked one of the officers.

I mumbled something and then the policeman handed me a piece of paper and he spoke. “The judge will sort this out.”

We were summoned to appear at the Magistrates Courts, in Bridge Road Richmond, on a given date and a specific time, as stated on the piece of paper that the policeman handed to me.

I didn’t want to lose my driver’s licence for several reasons, including using my trusted Beetle to search, locate and return absconding students back to the school. My science teacher, who was also the prefect master, asked me If I could drive him in my car around the narrow streets of Richmond looking for absconding students at lunch time. His car wasn’t suitable as it was a large American car (Pontiac something...) and it couldn’t manoeuvre around the narrow lanes of Richmond.

The reason some students absconded school was because a lot of children of migrant parents were at an awkward age when they arrived in Australia. They were too old to enrol into a primary school and ill-prepared to enter a secondary school. They found it extremely difficult to learn the English language, as well as to study the curriculum. They obeyed their parent’s demands by going to school in the morning and returning home in the afternoon. Those that couldn’t last the whole day at school would escape and loiter around the streets and return to their homes in the

afternoon. This explains why some migrant baby boomers did not complete their secondary education and consequently very few went on to tertiary studies. Indeed, an awkward time. The prefect master and I were searching the streets for those students.

To save my driver's licence and hopefully to escape with a warning instead of a fine, my brother and I decided to face the judge with humility. Additionally, we would plead ignorance of the Australian road rules. We were advised to dress in suits with white shirts and a tie and to address the judge by the title of "Your Honour". We turned up at the Magistrates Courts dressed like penguins and during all that time I was mentally repeating the title "Your Honour, Your Honour" in my mind. This was a new phrase for me and I was hoping that I would not confuse it with the title of "Your Majesty". I had seen that title on the portrait of the Queen of England that we had hung in our lounge room of our house. Yes, I was a proud British subject after being naturalised. I hung a framed picture of the Queen of England in our lounge room. The framed picture read "Our Majesty the Queen of England".

The courtroom was busy on the day of our hearing. There was an interesting case before our hearing and I listened to it from start to finish. A lady from an Italian background pleaded guilty to selling grappa (distilled alcoholic drink) on a Sunday in her café in Swan Street, Richmond. Selling alcohol on Sundays was illegal and she knew that, otherwise she wouldn't have been serving the two plain-clothed policemen grappa in tea cups. Well, she

was guilty, there was no doubt about it. The judge asked her if she wanted to say something in her defence.

Well, an emotional plea for mercy came out of her quivering lips, accompanied with lots of hand-waving. “Mr judge, I am a poor lady, I have four bambinos to feed, I work all week in my café to buy food for my family!”

The judge took the hook, line and half of the sinker. He handed the café owner a small fine. “Since you have a large family to feed, I will fine you only $300 and I will give you three months to pay the fine,” said the judge.

The self-labelled “poor lady” was delighted with the lenient sentence. She pulled out a bundle of green notes from her cleavage and with a jovial voice shouted “I pay now.”

The judge raised his weary eyes over his drooping glasses, and I could tell from the look on his face that he realised that he made a wrong judgement. He imposed a lenient sentence.

Our case was next and I realised now that the judge wouldn’t fall for a plea of ignorance, after that Italian lady’s crocodile tears. The judge stated our names and our address and asked me If that was correct.

I answered with the phrase “Yes, your Majesty.”

Oh no, the wrong title came out of my mouth. I could see a slight smile forming at one corner of the Judge’s mouth and then his whole face lit up and he relaxed for a

moment. I could tell from his facial expression that he thought we were innocent as newly-born babies.

I went on... and explained to the judge, “his Majesty”, that we were new arrivals to Australia. And that we didn’t have cars in our village and that there were no road laws in our village, and so on. So, instead of us pleading ignorance, the judge told us that we were ignorant of the Australian road rules. He gave us fatherly advice and told us that when people arrive in a new country they should learn the country’s laws first. We were thrilled with the outcome, but the two policemen who booked us were not. They will appear again for their revenge in another chapter where I will explain why I was counting cars that passed in front of our house. By the way, dressing up as penguins did the trick.

On the way out of the court room I saw Ditty lined up in the queue waiting for his court case.

“What are you doing here Ditty?” I asked.

He said that he was on a rape charge. I wondered what the judge would make of that. That day would have been an emotional roller coaster for “his Majesty”.

I Wish I Didn't Do That

Recently, I met up with an old school friend for coffee in a cafe on Maroondah Hwy in Mitcham. We spoke at length about the old times, the mid-60s, about the times we spent at Richmond Tech and in Richmond the suburb. My friend summarized that era, and in that general location, as "The best times ever". Socrates is no fool; he has studied at tertiary level, he has worked in various professional jobs, ran his own businesses, has travelled widely, married and raised a family. And now he helps his daughters with raising their children. Socrates has done a lot. And now in his retirement he is reminiscing about "the times in the old school yard", about the time we spent in my parents' backyard, and he reminded me of how much he loved driving his MGB around the Kew Boulevard (more about this later). I wholeheartedly agree with Socrates "the philosopher", as I used to call him.

So, the next day after the coffee meeting in Mitcham, I drove to Richmond to see the old school, to see the oval where I, as a year-10 student, ran training laps around the oval. And where I also flew the model aeroplanes that I made with Carmelo. Oh, yes, images of the "best times ever" were starting to form in my head.

I walked along Gleadell Street to see the Richmond Girls School where my sister studied. And where our school held an end-of-year social during mid-year of the 11th year, my last year at Richmond Tech. It was 1966, the teachers from both schools organised a befitting event to mark the

end of our secondary school education. I remember our art class was crafting invitation cards for the social. The invitation card that was chosen to be printed and to be used featured a cowboy boot (a trendy item in those days) on the front page. The event was topped off with the hiring of the pop group “The Five”, who provided the musical atmosphere that was in keeping with the swinging 60s – the great years.

Things are different now. The girls’ school has been replaced with a school named Lynall Hall Community School, a community school that caters for students that for various reasons don’t attend mainstream schools. Leo Berry’s boxing gym has been refurbished, and now it attracts people dressed in Lycra who punch hanging bags that don’t fight back. Carlos Parara, the Spanish kid from Richmond Tech, would train there, in Leo’s gym, with sparring partners who did fight back. The school’s oval, now named Citizens Park, has changed into a playground for cute, manicured dogs, where for a short time of the day they are freed from their masters' tiny apartments and are allowed to run free and to relieve themselves in the park. Their masters dutifully walk around the park with blue plastic bags in hand, cleaning after the cuties. But the saddest thing of all is that Richmond Technical, together with the senior motor mechanics apprentice school, has disappeared altogether.

It’s good to see progress, but it’s sad to see the good times evaporate; we can’t go back in time to cry over the tech school’s demise, crying will not help.

So for now let us imagine that we are back in time, in the principal's office in 1966, where the head prefect Mario was suspended from school by the strict and determined principal of Richmond Tech who wanted to uphold the great reputation of the school. He told Mario to go home and to stay there and return only if he was wearing the correct school uniform.

All of this came about because Mario wore a jumper that his mother had knitted for him. Mario's mother wanted to show her appreciation for her son, who was voted head prefect of the school. Mario's mother knitted the jumper in the correct school colours, including the yellow band around the neck. But the principal dug his heels deep into the ground that day and demanded a machine knitted jumper. The principal underestimated the regard Mario had for his mother and because of that he paid dearly for his stubborn insistence for the correct school jumper. Eventually Mario relented and returned to the school, with a machine knitted jumper and a plan for revenge.

Mario prepared a wooden board with lots of large nails protruding through the board and placed it behind the rear tyre of the principal's car. Mario wanted to puncture the car's tyre. The principal drove the car over the board, but the car bent the nails without puncturing the tyre. Mario was still determined to get his revenge. So he asked me if I could devise a better tyre-puncturing tool.

I was happy to oblige, because I like making things and I knew how to improve on his design. I approached this task

as a research and development project. Starting with the drawing of the car's wheel to scale, shaping a board into a wedge so that the tyre would ride over the board, and finally I fixed the nails to the board. The nails were pointing at right angles to the circumference of the tyre so that the nails would penetrate the tyre without bending. I didn't see my device in action, but I was told that it worked. Just then a strange feeling went through me, a feeling of pride that my device worked and a feeling of guilt that I was complicit in puncturing the school principal's tyre. The principal who did so much for the school and who was so good to me. I then wished that I hadn't designed that tyre-puncturing tool.

There is another thing I wish that I didn't do and that I am ashamed of. This incident is as strange and as weird as a scene from an Alfred Hitchcock movie. The incident is about an innocent girl and her mother. And I understood how this incident came about because I knew, like that particular girl's mother, another mother who had a similar past. A single mother from a war-torn European country. So, back to the school where this uncalled-for incident occurred. It was when I was ushering a group of girls from Richmond Girls School to Richmond Tech for a stage play in our school. One particular girl was staring at me for a long time, looking at me as she went past, she turned around and continued to stare at me. I was annoyed and I yelled at her "Boo" in a demeaning way, which totally embarrassed her and I felt guilty straight away. Her mother, who was nearby, came up to me and told me that her daughter "can sew collars on

shirts" (in the past people replaced worn collars of their shirts by sewing new ones on). I instantly shrank to the size of a mouse and I wanted to disappear.

This is what a desperate and lonely mother would say. I knew straight away that she was looking for a suitable husband for her daughter, and I knew that I hurt that girl's feelings. The mother wanted to secure her daughter's future. That's what people from Eastern European countries did then, just after the Second World War. This incident was a prelude to the "marriage game" that Macedonians practised. The marriage game will be covered in another chapter. I wish that I didn't do that to that innocent girl and her lonely mother.

Let us now go to the better times that Socrates and I reminisced about, those "best times ever".

Every time I meet up with Socrates he brings up the Wednesday afternoon sports days at the ice-skating rink, the St Moritz ice-skating rink in St Kilda, with Miss Leane Wesley. Miss Wesley was one of those adventurous teachers who was courageous enough to teach at Richmond Tech. On Wednesdays she supervised the four boys who participated in speed skating at the ice-skating rink. We went there in my Volkswagen Beetle, with me driving, Miss Wesley in the passenger's seat, and the other three boys in the back seat. The rear passengers were making rude remarks and suggestive motions behind Leane all the way to the St Moritz skating rink. I still can't believe how the principal of our school allowed four hot-blooded boys to

drive a young female teacher, clad in a mini skirt, to St Kilda. I suppose he trusted us because three of us were prefects after all, including the head prefect, Mario.

The other teacher who was brave enough to teach at our school was Miss Marrie Cooper. She came all the way from Williamstown to teach us history and she captivated us with her considerable naval-history knowledge and her entertaining presentations. However, her lack of knowledge regarding the Russian communist movement was exposed by Vasyl Mayanko.

"If the hat fits, wear it, Mayanko," shouted Miss Cooper.

I didn't know what she meant by that statement, but Vasyl went on and he corrected Miss Cooper about the "Bolsheviks" communist party. I suspected that Vasyl had firsthand knowledge about the Bolsheviks from his family. Miss Cooper graciously accepted Mayanko's correction and because of that she gained the boys' respect.

Miss Cooper's specialty was about the naval operations in the Pacific Ocean during World War 2. She liked talking about the naval action in the Malacca Straits and we liked listening about the "Malaka Straits" and we kept on asking her to tell us more about the "Malaka Straits". During all that time that we were kidding her about our interest in the "Malaka Straits", she didn't realise that we had our private joke about the word "Malaka". Ask someone who knows Greek what that word means in Greek.

Miss Wesley didn't last long in the school; a mini skirt can hold the boys' attention for so long. Miss Cooper on the other hand, who didn't wear a mini skirt, but drove a mini, a Morris Mini that is, kept her job by virtue of her knowledge, bubbly personality, charm and sense of humour. The Morris Mini played a crucial part in the rapport she built up with her senior students. As they enjoyed lifting her Morris Mini and placing it in unusual locations around the school's car parking lot, just for fun.

Yes, Richmond Technical School within the Richmond community was an amazing place then, in the 1960s. That time really was the "best time ever". And it was where I think Multicultural Australia stemmed from. I felt that I belonged in this multicultural Australia, but I felt that outside those multicultural inner suburbs of Melbourne lurked the "true blue Aussie". Unlike the mythical Australian bunyip that doesn't exist, there must be some true blue Aussies who do exist out there. And I was determined to find some of them and to be like them If I could.

Searching For The Elusive True Blue Aussie

The suburb of Richmond was a small demographic sample of the multicultural Aussie population. Besides that, it was full of migrants. If I was serious about finding the true blue Aussie, I had to increase my search area. In the school yard of North Richmond Primary school, I serendipitously met Russell Morris, my first quintessential Aussie friend. He and I went on to Richmond Tech, but because of his different interests and the formation of separate groups of friends, we sort of drifted apart. In my area of interests there were ample opportunities to find the true blue Aussie.

At Richmond Tech I met Richard Bader, he looked like a typical Aussie, but he had a slightly strange accent. We ran training laps around the school oval together; he ran faster than I could run because he had longer legs. The physical education teacher thought that he had the potential to represent Australia at the Olympics. If he stopped smoking and if he trained harder, that is. The nicotine-stained fingers on his right hand said otherwise, he was addicted to smoking and that put an end to his Olympic dreams. For a moment there I thought that I found the typical Aussie, the outdoor type with blonde hair, long legs and smoking like a chimney. But no, he turned out to have a Dutch background, which explained his strange accent and his long legs.

Then I made friends with Jack MacDonald, because I drove him to a surf beach one day somewhere past Geelong in my trusty Volkswagen Beetle. Jack was grateful to me for

driving him to the surf beach, so he gave me one of his surfboards in gratitude. Jack had lots of surfboards; he was rich. He was one of those well-to-do people who lived on Richmond Hill. I was fortunate to have met Jack, and that was because of his father's decision to enroll Jack at Richmond Tech. He had just recently moved to Richmond Tech from a private school, and that was because Jack's father found out that Jack didn't like academic subjects and that he was better with his hands than he was with his brain, like I was. Jack wasn't the full true blue Aussie that I was looking for, he was an import. He told me that his family immigrated from Scotland when he was a baby, so Jack was not a true blue Aussie, despite looking like an Aussie with that surfie-induced sun tan.

And then along came John Bentley as the next candidate for a true blue Aussie. A well-groomed young man, very quiet, well-mannered and very polite. When he spoke to me, he sounded like the Queen of England was speaking. That is when she spoke during her Christmas messages to her Commonwealth subjects. John Bentley behaved and looked like he was an exchange student from an English private school. I also lost contact with John, because he didn't follow me to Swinburne College of Advanced Education, as it was called then. Now it is named Swinburne University. I suspected John could have gone back to "Eton", in England to complete his year 12.

While I was searching for the true blue Aussie by looking for the stereotypical traits of an Aussie, an unusually friendly, well-dressed boy found me. I would not have

picked him for an Aussie at first sight, he wasn't eating a pie, he wasn't wearing a footy guernsey and he didn't call me "mate", he hardly spoke to anyone. He was the silent type, but he spoke enough to tell me his name.

"Ray Noble is my name," he said.

A real cool individual, he was sure of himself and he liked hanging around with me. We went to the movies together; he taught me ice-skating at St Moritz in St Kilda. He played ice hockey for the Victorian under 16s ice hockey team and he introduced me to Porsche motor cars at his uncle's sports car dealership (Dutton's Motors).

And one day we spent the whole day exploring the green environs of Richmond that I didn't know existed until now, even though they were within a few kilometres from Kent Street. We walked along Victoria Street, the street separating industrial Richmond from the fully industrial Abbotsford. We went past the skipping girl vinegar sign, we turned left at the end of the industrial part of Abbotsford, we then crossed a footbridge over the Yarra River, which I saw for the first time.

We found ourselves in a totally natural landscape, full of gum trees and low green bushes. We kept walking along the curvy and fenced road that Ray called The Boulevard (Kew Boulevard) until we came to an opening in the fence. We walked through the opening and found ourselves in the very rugged Australian bushland, very steep, almost vertical, like a cliff. As we were walking downwards, we were holding

on to branches of low bushes and descending towards the Yarra River deep below us.

Ray spoke quietly. “Nobody knows this place.”

Ray found the hollow place that he was looking for; it was a cave, dug into the vertical clay wall. A cave that can house about five fully grown men. But it wasn’t dug out recently, one could tell that by the worn and smoked walls of the cave. This was an ancient cave.

Ray spoke again, this time with a hushed tone in his voice. “Aboriginals lived here before the British came to Australia.”

I instantly thought to myself, the original Aussies have gone. Just then I felt a tinge of sadness.

Ray was a source of early Australian historical information. Later in the afternoon he took me to Dights Falls where we could still see the remains of the flour mill that was powered by the low waterfall in the Yarra River. A few years later I went rowing in a boat there with my girlfriend Lyn, just above the falls. And the Kew Boulevard behind the fenced area became our private racing track, later on. All within the land of the first true Australians, the Aboriginals. Now I am starting to realise that the “true blue Aussie” is a recent label that the locals want to be identified by.

So now, instead of searching for the true blue Aussie, I am trying to find a proper and fitting description of what defines the present inhabitants of modern Australia.

A jingle that included the words “Football, meat pies, kangaroos and Holden cars” was very popular many years ago as an overall description of the true Aussie. “Vegemite” could be another mandatory requirement, but I didn’t include Vegemite in my list of Aussie prerequisites because I have this requirement well and truly covered. I like Vegemite by the way, but I found that it needs more salt. So I have it on toast with feta cheese on it. I have multi-culturalized Vegemite.

The search for the true blue Aussie has now been redefined to the search for the definition of a true blue Aussie.

Swinburne promised a greater probability of finding a definition of a true blue Aussie because it attracted students from a greater geographic area, it has a greater catchment area than Richmond Tech. I was right in assuming that at Swinburne there would be a greater chance of finding what defines a true blue Aussie. But I found more than I expected, I found more ethnics at Swinburne than I imagined there would be, along with a sprinkling of a few Aussies. There were students from Hong Kong, from Malaysia, from India, from China and there was me, from Macedonia.

And then I met an interesting looking student by the name of Henry Moore (not Henry Moore, the British sculptor). The Aussie Henry Moore stood out amongst the global ethnics groups — he had the physical features of a typical Aussie, long legs and freckles on his face and when

he spoke he would shorten most words and he would add an “O” to a lot of other words.

“What are you doing this arvo?” he would ask me in a distinct Aussie accent.

And he was from the elite Melbourne suburb by the name of Balwyn. We became friends and we stayed friends for the four years that I was at Swinburne.

One day at lunch time Henry invited me to his parents' house for lunch, he wanted to introduce me to his mum. His mum prepared a nice meal of lamb cutlets with mash potatoes and peas. I was led to their well-set-out dining room by Henry while his mum was watching at a respectable distance behind us with a curious amazement. I had the feeling that people in Balwyn had not met or seen too many foreign people before. As I sat down on the dining table I turned around and I caught a glimpse of Henry’s mother with her eyes wide open and her mouth in the shape of a long horizontal rectangle — putting on an embarrassed smile because she was caught spying on me. I can only assume that she wanted to see if I would use the cutlery, or if I would eat with my fingers. By the way, that was the first time that I ate lamb cutlets and peas. We ate lamb stew, roast lamb and BBQed lamb on a spit, we didn't cook lamb cutlets and we had our mash potatoes with garlic. I used the fork to eat the mash potatoes and I scooped up the peas with the fork as well, knowing too well that it’s pretty difficult to stab a pea with a fork.

It was a pleasant lunch and an amicable meeting with Henry's mum. On the way out of the dining room we walked along the passage of the house, past a bedroom with its door slightly ajar. Then Henry told me not to look into the bedroom because his sister was in there with her boyfriend and they were "at it". Whatever that meant?

In casual conversation Henry told me that his parents were very conservative and that they came from England as "ten-pound poms", another term that I didn't understand. Conservative? With their daughter and her boyfriend in the bedroom? Was this an example of an oxymoron? By now I was starting to be disillusioned with the idea of finding a definition of a true blue Aussie.

By the way, my time at Swinburne wasn't completely wasted by the task of searching for the true blue Aussie definition because I met other young people. People like David Poon, who helped me pass a practical report on "*thermocouples*". Intuitively I knew the lecturer was wrong and I wanted to write my "correct" answer on the report. David then gave me "Confucius-like" advice.

"Sometimes the wrong answer is the correct answer. In other words, " he said "Tell the lecturer what he wants to hear and you will pass."

I told the lecturer what he wanted to hear and I did pass.

Another useful student I met at Swinburne was Cheong Lee. He invited me into his rented flat in Hawthorn for lunch

one day and there he taught me how to cook fried rice. I still cook that meal today but in a slightly modified way. I use angel-hair pasta instead of rice and I add Kransky sausage to it and call it “sweet and sour Kransky”. It’s a multicultural dish and my daughter still loves it.

My parents on the other hand started to think that I was turning into an Aussie. With good reason because I was mixing with boys of different backgrounds, I was studying something they didn’t understand and every now and then I would go surfing or snow skiing, depending on the season – activities that were foreign to my parents.

My parents thought I was shunning our Macedonian culture. They had different plans for us kids; they were thinking of and saving money for our weddings. They were hoping that I would be working full time by now. They didn’t know what college I was going to and they didn’t know what I was studying.

Dad would say to me: “Look at your cousin, he is two years younger than you and he is a motor mechanic, already earning money.”

I felt like I was straddling the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and the ridge was getting wider. The two cultures were pulling me apart, like the two tectonic plates were pulling the Mid-Atlantic Ridge apart. I was a skip at home and I was a foreigner outside the house.

Now the task at hand was for me to look and act like an Aussie in the general community and to please my parents

at home by adhering to the Macedonian way of life, particularly for dad, with whom I had a telepathic understanding.

One warm evening in December when mum's brother came over from Perth for a family visit, dad put on the show that Macedonians like to see. It was past midnight, dad and my uncle were still chatting away on the front veranda when I pulled up in my trusty Beetle. Dad put on a convincing act for my uncle.

“Do you know what time it is? I told you to come back before 12 o'clock. You can sleep in the car now.”

Telepathically he told me to stay in the car until my uncle goes to bed, then I can come into the house. Sure enough, at about 20 minutes past midnight there was a knock on the car’s window. We put on a convincing act for mum’s brother that evening.

It was virtually impossible to please mum because she was very religious and set in her ways of thinking. She wanted me to become a priest, of all things. I thought to myself “Oh my God, how can I do that?” We compromised. I told mum that I would take her to church on Sundays (whenever I could), and I did that until mum met Peter Daicos’s aunty in church one Sunday – Yes, Peter Daicos, the Collingwood AFL football player – and she took over my duties of driving mum to church in her late model Mercedes Benz.

By now I knew that for me to fit the definition of an Aussie I must act like an Aussie. I had to follow footy, show interest in kangaroos (not the footy team), eat meat pies and drive a Holden motor car. And that is what I tried to do.

I chose to follow the Melbourne football club, mainly because of Ron Barassi, who was playing for them and he had a name that stood out and it was easy for me to remember.

For the kangaroo requirement, I liked watching the television series “Skippy the Bush Kangaroo”. Skippy was very smart. I was amazed how it understood Sonny’s instructions and, with a clicking sound from its mouth, Skippy would run off and do something that your everyday grey kangaroo couldn’t do.

Owning and hence driving a Holden motor car was out of the question for me – I had my trusty Volkswagen Beetle.

So, I had to come good with eating meat pies. Until now, six years in Australia, I had not tasted a pie, let alone eaten a meat pie, not even the coveted “Four'N Twenty” variety.

One Saturday afternoon on my way to the MCG, where I sold footy records for pocket money and to buy my sports car, I met another young businessman also going to the MCG, to sell meat pies.

Wow, I thought to myself, this is my chance to buy and eat a pie. I bought a pie from him, but he told me that the

pie was cold. So, what? I have eaten cold z*elnik* (Macedonian pastry) before without any drama.

Well, there was drama, a big drama. I don't think the piece of pie that I ate touched the bottom of my stomach before it was out again, together with the rest of my stomach's contents. The drama lasted for about four years. That is how long it took me before I attempted to eat another pie.

The first time I ate a pie after the cold-pie rejection was on a day trip to Rutherglen. This time it was a hot pie with tomato sauce that I squeezed out of a small plastic cube. It tasted delicious. Then and there I made a mental note to myself that I will always eat a hot meat pie when I am out in the countryside.

It takes a long time to become a true blue Aussie, as explained by Bill Peach, who in one of his current affairs programs was interviewing two old Aussies from Echuca. They were the archetypal true blue Aussies, wearing the signature blue singlets and all that.

Bill asked them If they were mates, one of them answered: "After working together for thirty years, I guess we can call ourselves mates."

From that statement I inferred that it might take me thirty or more years to become a true blue Aussie. So I dropped my quest of behaving like a true blue Aussie. I figured I was already some sort of an Aussie. Maybe a

Macedonian Aussie who eats his Vegemite with feta cheese. And that was good enough for me.

Now I wanted to be a cool-looking Macedonian Aussie, nearly as cool as James Dean. Not only was he cool, he drove a cool car. James Dean drove a Porsche 550 for a while (before his untimely death in his own Porsche) and I nearly bought a Porsche myself; a cheaper model than Dean's Porsche.

Failing to buy the Porsche Speedster, I bought a duffle coat one day because it looked cool on an Aussie who was wearing one in Victoria Street, Richmond. I wore that duffle coat in Victoria Street one day and tried to look cool, just like that cool-looking Aussie did. The duffle coat didn't do the trick. I was reassured of that fact when I overheard someone say: "What is that stupid looking wog doing in a duffle coat?"

From then on I stuck to my favourite thing – cars. I will devote a whole chapter on cars.

I still eat Vegemite with feta cheese, like a multicultural Aussie does. But before that, the Vietnam War got in the way, as you will find out in the next chapter where the multicultural Aussie also scored some brownie points.

The Cut-Lunch Soldier

It was that bubbly and enthusiastic teacher by the name of Miss Cooper again who alerted us, the students of year 11 in Richmond Tech, and informed us about the looming Vietnam War that Australia was about to get involved in. Miss Cooper told us that the Australian Government was about to introduce conscription, national service, for males turning 20 years old, starting from the year 1965 and they will continue conscripting young men onwards as required.

The conscripts were to be chosen by a birthday ballot. This method of choosing recruits for national service was based on pure luck alone. Wooden marbles with numbers representing the days of the month and numbers representing the months of the year were inscribed on them. The marbles were chosen at random from a barrel. If your birthday coincided with the numbers drawn from that barrel, you were called up for national service for your country. If your birthday did not come up, you were free as a bird. But for those who were chosen by that ill-conceived birthday ballot, there was a strong possibility that they would be sent overseas – to a country they possibly had never heard of before, to do battle with people that they had never seen before.

Miss Cooper asked her students to write an essay as a social studies project, expressing their thoughts about this unfair conscription.

At this time of the year, I was approaching the age of 19 and soon the time when my name could have been chosen from that unfair birthday ballot barrel. I had strong opposing feelings about that unjust and potentially deadly enforcement the Australian Government was making on its young men. I wanted to avoid national service at any cost.

So I expressed my heartfelt opposing feelings in an essay that Miss Cooper was impressed with. So much so that she read it aloud at our school assembly. My essay was chosen to be read because it opened up with a strong and emotional sentence. It went on, something like this: I have just arrived in Australia from a war-torn country with nothing but a suitcase full of clothes. And now the Australian Government removed the clothes from my suitcase, replaced my clothes with a rifle. And now the Government wants me to go to Vietnam to shoot people who did no harm to me. Nor are they a threat to our country.

The essay, no matter how emotive it was, would not have saved me from national service. The authorities were aware that young people would resist national service and they covered all loopholes for avoiding it. The authorities were very strict with anyone trying to avoid national service. But luckily there were exemptions to national service provided one met at least one of the following conditions.

1. Family hardship: If one was the only breadwinner for their dependent parents, or running a farm.

2. If one was a tertiary student, or apprentice in an approved trade, this would defer the conscription until he completed his course.
3. If one had flat feet.
4. If one was below 5 feet 2 inches in height.
5. If one was gay.
6. If one had a criminal record.
7. If one had a mental disability or psychological problems, he had to sit a medical and a psychological test.
8. If one was a member of the Citizens Military Forces~~,~~ prior the age of 19. Even this exemption did not fully preclude one from going to Vietnam. If the war effort required more manpower, then CMF soldiers would be sent to Vietnam.
9. If one was a conscientious objector. Not many conscientious objectors were successful in their applications at avoiding national service; some were jailed, most of them were given non-combatant duties. Only a few managed to gain exemption from national service.

My best option in avoiding a free trip to Vietnam with paid accommodation and food included and not having to take the gamble with the birthday marble was for me to join the Citizens Military Forces. I joined the CMF (dubbed the cut-lunch army). My application was accepted and I became a cut-lunch soldier for the next six years, starting from the age of 19.

Six years of part time service with the CMF was equivalent to two years of full time, plus another three years in the reserves for the conscripts (dubbed “the nashos”).

The six years with CMF comprised of:

1. Two weeks away per year, training in the field.
2. Ten weekends away per year, training in the field.
3. One evening per week covering theory on military matters at a military unit.

All I had to do now was to choose a military unit that was compatible with my interests. The Royal Army Ordnance Corp (RAOC) was beckoning me and it was near my house. The RAOC unit was in East Melbourne. I enlisted there to complete my national service, mainly due to its proximity to my house and that it involved driving trucks which interested me.

Now this chapter, “The Cut-Lunch Soldier”, appearing in this book about me being "An Aussie in a Parallel Universe”, may not appear relevant to the main theme of this book. But I want to show you that the army is a subset of the Australian multicultural community and it contains an added layer of complexity that differentiates between individuals. So I will continue with this chapter for a bit longer to show you, the reader, that the army is a multi-status group of men within a multicultural Australia.

In addition to suspected racism, there is elitism in the army. The army is divided into two main groups of

personnel. The commissioned officers and the non-commissioned officers, and within each of the two groups of personnel there are several different ranks of status. During my six years with the CMF I learned that the easiest way for a national serviceman to understand the military structure and to co-exist in the army during their compulsory service is to apply some sense of humour. This outlook helped me cope with the rigid procedures in the military. I actually enjoyed my time with the military because I saw the funny side of army life.

The first thing that I remember at RAOC was when I was completing a Psychological/ IQ questionnaire. I was seated next to a recruit named “Jason Ion”, who was studying industrial chemistry at Monash Uni. I could not believe his surname was “Ion”, as this in chemical terms means a charged atom or a charged molecule.

I could see that he was ticking the same boxes on the questionnaire and presumably the correct answers as I was. Half way down the list of questions, I decided to tick the wrong answers from then on, just for fun and to see what the CMF would make of this.

Well, the CMF authorities decided to exclude me from any training courses. This exclusion precluded me from rising up the military ranks; they didn’t think I was “officer material”. So I was given the lowest rank in the army, that of a “private”, and I remained at this low rank for my entire tenure with the CMF. This suited me just fine, because now I could switch my brain into “idle-mode” and enjoy the next

six years in the CMF without having to think. In this mode, I was the ideal private, someone who follows orders and risks repetitive strain injury by saluting the commissioned officers.

And now the fun begins.

I was driving a 1945 Studebaker 6-wheel-drive World War 2 truck from the army depot in Kensington towards Puckapunyal, the military training ground, with a truck load of new recruits. When I entered the Hume Highway and started to accelerate towards the highway's speed limit, the soldiers in the back of the truck yelled out that the truck was on fire.

I stopped the truck, pulled over to the side of the highway and saw that the hand brake was glowing red hot. The hand brake on that truck was made of a metal disc fixed to the drive shaft and it was visible to the recruits. Although this is not funny, it shows that I was in idle mode as a private. By the way, that truck had so much torque that I couldn't tell that the hand brake was on.

The next episode was with the same truck. But this time I was undertaking night driving training with the truck having most of the light beam of its headlights covered except for a slight horizontal slit across the headlights for me to see the road with. The narrow slit was affording a minimum visual light exposure to the make-believe enemy.

I was enjoying the drive, along a twisty dirt road in Mt Macedon, with a Lieutenant beside me and a cast-iron

water-trailer (a Furphy) hitched to the back of the truck. It was past midnight; I was driving slowly and with total concentration. This was a challenging drive during a pitch-dark night, on a slippery road, towing a heavy Furphy trailer, and with a Lieutenant snoozing away in the passenger's seat. Next morning we noticed that the truck had its trailer missing. Nothing was said about the trailer by the Lieutenant who was on sleep-mode during the dark-night drive. The trailer is still resting to this day somewhere in the Mt Macedon ranges.

By now I had accumulated about six different driving licences. And now, for my next licence, I found myself together with the Lieutenant next to me in a tricky situation. I had to negotiate a very steep descent of a narrow dirt track in a new model truck with large wheels. This truck was fitted with powerful air brakes. My task was to successfully negotiate the steep dirt track in order to pass my seventh licence.

As I approached the steep slope, I tried to select a lower gear by the method of double-clutching, so that the truck would descend the narrow track slowly under engine braking. I couldn't engage a lower gear, so the truck bowed down the steep incline in neutral, i.e. no gear was selected and therefore no engine braking. The truck started to accelerate along the steep slope. This time the Lieutenant was fully awake and looked rather alarmed in the passenger seat.

I told him: “I won’t use the brakes, as this may destabilise the truck at this speed.”

It is very easy to lock the front wheels of a truck fitted with air brakes, causing the wheels to lock and to skid and thus losing control of the truck, especially on a dirt track.

The truck rushed at break-neck speed while I was skilfully steering it to avoid the trees along the narrow track. Eventually the speeding truck slowed down as we approached a rise in the narrow track. The Lieutenant who was a competent driver himself and who had raced his own home-made special car on many occasions at Calder Raceway, agreed with me and at the conclusion of that driving manoeuvre he awarded me with my seventh licence.

The seventh licence was a reward and a welcome gift from the CMF. My reward was a promotion to an important role, still within the rank of a private, a private with brownie points.

I was assigned to the duty of the official driver for the Colonel of the CMF. I had it easy from then on. All I had to do from then on was to take the Colonel from Puckapunyal to the Victoria Barracks in St Kilda Road Melbourne in the official military Holden EH and return him back to Puckapunyal, together with a carton of confidential items.

The rest of the day was mine to spend as I wished. One night, on my return trip to Puckapunyal, I was rewarded with a sharp and a genuine salute (even though I wasn’t a commissioned officer) by one of the guards whom I had

ordered to take the carton containing the confidential items straight to the officers' mess and to place it in the fridge. The confidential bottles of beer have to be kept cold, I told him.

By now, one would think that a driver with seven driving licences and who was trusted to drive the Colonel in the official military car would be immune to road accidents. But no, orders are orders, I was literally ordered to have an accident in the Studebaker.

On this occasion I was driving to a petrol service station somewhere near Pretty Sally Hill to refuel the “Study”. And this time I had Sergeant Clark, a fellow student from Richmond Tech (don’t you love these coincidences), in the passenger’s seat.

As we entered the service station, Sergeant Clark jumped out of the truck and proceeded to direct me with military authorized hand signals in order for me to negotiate the “Study” into a tight spot between two rows of petrol pumps. But I could see in the rear-view mirror that the canopy of the truck was going to snag the overhanging light pole between the two petrol pumps. So I promptly stopped the truck.

The Sergeant then morphed into Yosemite Sam, the character from the “Bugs Bunny” show, and ran towards me yelling: “When I say go, you go, private.”

So I went and I drove the “Study” forward and I could hear the canopy tearing and I could see the light pole

starting to tilt the petrol pump. Then the ever-diligent Sergeant gave me the official stop sign, which I obeyed and I stopped the “Study” with a purposefully slow reaction time. The Sergeant ran to the truck’s driver’s door and with military precision presented me with a “section 13” and told me to fill in the details (section 13 is an accident report). This was just another day in the life of a private in the CMF.

The next near-miss accident could have had devastating results and this time it was my fault and it wasn’t funny.

Williamstown Rifle Range was used by the CMF as well as by the nashos for target practice, with live ammunition.

This is where we were trained to use the 7.6mm self-loading rifle (SLR) and the Owen 9mm sub-machine gun. The SLR was fired from the prone position at fixed targets about 200 metres away. We were concentrating on accuracy and on controlling the rate of fire of the SLR. The Owen 9mm sub-machine gun on the other hand was fired from the hip, while we were standing up. The main objective with the sub-machine gun was to keep it steady, as it has a tendency to move in an arc away from the target when the weapon is fired. The Owen sub-machine gun is a rapid-firing-rugged weapon, but prone to jamming.

The Sergeant who was instructing us on how to use the sub-machine gun instructed us as follows. In the case of the weapon jamming, we were to face forward towards the targets and to raise our hand for help with unjamming the weapon.

I must have been in idle-mode when my sub-machine gun jammed, because I turned around to tell the Sergeant that my weapon jammed. The Sergeant instantly yelled: “Everybody down.”

I could have easily shot down two or three soldiers to my right if the machine gun had freed itself.

There were other “misadventures” that often infuriated the Sergeant. Such as the time when I and one of the AFL footballers who I befriended decided to run at our top speed during a routine march.

The Collingwood football player and I would often go for a three-kilometre run in the afternoon (during rest and recreation time) to maintain our fitness.

The same Sergeant who directed me to have a driving accident ordered our section of soldiers to march at double time during one of those routine marches. I looked at the footy player and indicated to him that we should run flat-out. Well, I could hear the Sergeant yelling “Halt! Halt,” just like Yosemite Sam yells at the top of his voice at the camel in one of those Bugs Bunny cartoons.

We stopped and the Sergeant eventually caught up with us and disciplined us by ordering us to march around the latrines ten times at double time, with our rifles above our heads.

Well, the well-built footballer grabbed the rifle by its muzzle and held it over his head with one hand (it’s impossible for the average soldier to hold the rifle in this

way) and he asked the Sergeant: “Is this the way you want me to hold the rifle, Sergeant?”

I could literally see steam coming out of the Sergeant’s ears. I wasn’t strong enough to hold the rifle with one hand, so I marched at double time around the latrines whilst holding my rifle overhead with both hands. After that incident, military activities continued in Puckapunyal in an orderly manner.

Meanwhile, back to civilian life where there was a growing opposition to the Vietnam War in Australia as well as in America. This culminated with the Australian public voting the Labor Party into power with the charismatic Gough Whitlam as the prime minister. The newly elected prime minister had promised to abolish national service and delivered within days of gaining office.

Gough Whitlam honoured his promise and abolished national service, but then he and his government were abolished by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr. The events on the steps of the parliament house were televised for the afternoon news. By now every Australian has heard Gough Whitlam’s famous speech: “Well may we say God save the Queen because nothing will save the Governor-General.”

Well, Gough was right because nothing saved the Governor-General, but Gough saved many young men from national service, including saving a few months of my six-year tenure.

The sudden and immediate abolition of national service caused panic amongst the commanding officers (COs) of the military units, some of whom by now had become accustomed to a comfortable life, which was supplemented by tax-free alcohol. The CO of RAOC asked each and every member of his unit if they were happy at his military unit (in other words, please don't leave).

I saw an opportunity here to gain some practical skills from the military. I wanted to learn the practical skill of welding. So I asked to be transferred to the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (RAEME) unit, which had its training facility in Church Street, Windsor and where they taught welding. Within days I was being instructed in arc-welding, but there was a problem in the workshop.

There was a barking dog there in the form of a newly minted Second Lieutenant who was looking for salutes and who was interrupting my welding practice. The CO, who was desperate to keep his personnel and his job, would do anything including prioritising my demands over a commissioned officer's duties, which were practising his saluting technique. He told the newly minted officer not to come within saluting range of me again. I completed my course in welding and left the (RAEME) unit with gratitude to the Australian army for teaching me how to weld.

I was amazed that neither dad or mum ever asked me about my involvement with the CMF. I couldn't even start a conversation about my national service. Something was holding them back. Yet, when I drove dad and mum in my

trusty Volkswagen Beetle to Sale in Gippsland to see mum's first cousin, they would engage in an endless conversation with her cousin. The conversation was about their involvement with the partisans during the civil war in Greece. Mum's cousin, his wife and dad fought the Greek National Army during the Greek Civil War.

Migrants from Europe are still traumatised by the wars in Europe. My involvement with the CMF must have triggered memories of those traumatic times for dad and mum.

Mum's cousin (*vuiko Mitre – uncle Mitre*) and his family who live in Sale are forever grateful to dad and partly to me for helping them migrate to Australia. After the Greek Civil War, *vuiko Mitre* and his wife defected to Russia, in what was then the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. They started a family there, but they wanted to migrate to Australia to reunite with *Mitre's* parents. However, the Australian Government wouldn't accept immigrants from a communist country, such as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

This is where dad and I come in. Dad approached Dr Jim Cairns, the Labor deputy prime minister of Australia for help. I helped dad with the interpreting. Jim Cairns was a down-to-earth politician who was often seen shopping at the Camberwell market on some Sundays as an ordinary citizen. He was approachable and a capable statesman. He arranged for *vuiko Mitre* to first migrate into Greece, where he could become a Greek citizen, and after a period of three

years of compulsory citizenship in Greece he and his family were able to migrate to Australia.

Ironically, *Mitre* and his wife, both of whom fought with the communists and then lived in a communist country, were employed at the Royal Australian Air Force Base in Sale.

Vuiko Mitre and his wife lived happily in Sale until they both passed away recently, but their descendants are still in Gippsland enjoying the Australian way of life, courtesy of Dr Jim Cairns, and dad, with a minor contribution by me.

Ask The Boss To Give You Overtime

When my desperately poor but ambitious grandfather, actually my paternal grandfather's brother, came to Australia in the early 1920s, he saw a land of sweeping plains, of ragged mountain ranges and flooding rains as described accurately by Dorothea Mackellar in her iconic poem My Country. In addition to the vastness and the raw beauty of Australia, my grandfather saw something else to what Mackellar described in her poem.

He saw a rainbow with a pot of gold at its end. My grandfather followed that rainbow all the way to Tallangatta in north east Victoria, where he realised that the rainbow kept on moving ahead of him. Always a certain distance in front of him. Rainbows don't have a fixed position. My grandfather gave up chasing rainbows and that's when he found real gold in Tallangatta. Not a mythical pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. He found gold by clearing forests for farming land, for which he was paid in real gold money. Two years later he returned to Macedonia with a metaphorical pot of gold. He spread the word to his local community that Australia was a land of opportunity. "Australia was paved with gold," he told them.

Many other Macedonians travelled to Australia in those early years to shore up their financial position at home; those people are known as *pechalbari* (migrant workers who plan and strive to improve their lives). My grandfather and many of his contemporaries enjoyed the fruits that Australia provided them, until the political situation in

Europe changed and it made their lives miserable and unbearable, including our lives in Macedonia.

The Greek Civil War, which followed World War 2, was the last straw that forced my father to leave his village in Macedonia and to travel to Australia; to the land of opportunity. He came with a one-way ticket and a plan to bring and set up his family in the land of opportunity, which a few years later was dubbed “the lucky country”. It had taken dad eight years to feel confident enough and financially secure to bring us to Australia and to house us in a tiny house in Richmond. He managed to do that despite being afflicted by the deadly tuberculosis disease.

When post war migrants came to the lucky country, they saw it as an open-cut gold mine, full of gold which required lots of work by all family members to extract the riches that this lucky country was blessed with.

Migrants come to Australia prepared to work. They didn’t come for the social life. There wasn’t much of a social life in Australia, let alone in Richmond except for the social drink in the pubs after work. The pubs were places where workers would meet their mates for a yarn over a cold beer. During the sixties, men went to the bar after work and drank until the mandated 6.00 o'clock closing time. And on Saturdays there was the obligatory footy match for the whole family, full of action, full of colour and a place and time for the spectators to release their pent-up tension. Neither of these social activities were attractive to the migrants, and certainly not to my parents. In fact, most

newcomers to Australia, including myself, preferred to work extra hours instead of taking part in either or both of these new-to-us activities.

Dad didn't have the lung capacity for heavy work or to work extra hours after undergoing several lung surgeries to overcome the tuberculosis that he contracted shortly after arriving in Australia. Dad worked for very low wages (subsidised by the Australian Government) as a cleaner in a funeral business. But mum on the other hand worked at several manual jobs, making hats, or at other places sorting things on assembly lines. Mum would often bring work at home, what was termed "piece work" when she worked as a milliner, and was paid per item that she made.

I started work from about the age of 14 and continued working at various jobs right through to and beyond the time when I started full time employment as an engineer. I didn't see the extra work as a burden; I saw it as being somewhere, doing something at a given time.

My first "being somewhere, doing something at a particular time" was selling the Herald newspaper in Wellington Parade in East Melbourne opposite the MCG pub, which itself was opposite the MCG football ground. There were so many interesting things that went on around me and things that I saw during my working time at East Melbourne that made me think that I was in a theme park instead of a workplace. I won't bore you with all of the activities, but I will relate some interesting stories that may not be in chronological order as they roll out from my mind.

I love coincidences and I remember this particular coincidence well, even though it had taken place over a long period of time, 50 years in fact. When I was selling newspapers in Wellington Parade amongst parked cars while they were waiting at the traffic lights, a customer asked me for the “post”. I was completely puzzled by that request. Why does he want to buy a post? I thought to myself as I pointed to an electrical post on the footpath. He kept repeating the word “post, post” until the traffic lights changed and he drove off.

Later on I told the newsagent that a man was asking for a post. “What did he mean by that?” I asked the agent. The newsagent showed me two magazines, a Post and a Pix, and told me to have one of each when I am out selling the Heralds. He overloaded me with the two extra magazines from then on. When I finished selling the Heralds I took the time to flip through the two magazines. I found an interesting article in the Pix magazine, an article about the Icefields Parkway in Canada. The Icefields Parkway is a 230 km twisting road amongst the Rocky Mountains of Canada. The magazine showed a bird’s eye-view of the road and dubbed it the “toilet-bowl” highway because there was a section in the road that looked like a toilet bowl. Unbelievably, fifty years later, I went on a holiday to Canada and on that exact road I saw the same “toilet-bowl” that was in the Pix magazine.

Cliveden Mansions in East Melbourne was an exclusive block of apartments before it was pulled down and replaced with the Hilton Hotel. The apartments were occupied by

wealthy tenants. I was in the courtyard of those apartments and whilst I was delivering the Herald to one of the apartments I was stunned by the most unbelievable sight. Something I read about in car magazines and now here it was, in all of its glory for me to see at a close range. The magnificent Jaguar E-Type in metallic grey. Wow, the most beautiful car in the world at that time, as described by none other than Enzo Ferrari.

There was no shortage of amazing cars in East Melbourne. My first sight of the amazing Lotus Elan, the super low and stunning Lotus Europa, the outstanding Ferrari 330 Lusso with spoked aluminium wheels, had taken place in East Melbourne. Driving along Wellington Parade I saw Syd Heylen, a well-known Melbourne comedian during the 1960s, in his Red Triumph TR4 with its headlights protruding above the grill. What a sight! East Melbourne was like an open-air car museum of the latest sports cars.

In Jolimont lived Lex Davidson, a well-known and respected Melbourne open-wheeler race car driver. I delivered his newspaper there and I remember the sad day when he was killed whilst testing his race car at Sandown Racecourse.

I also delivered The Age to Lord Casey, the Governor-General of Australia. I saw his black 1950s Bentley with its sweeping mudguards. I also saw him in his matching black long-tailed tuxedo; probably going to cut a ribbon somewhere.

On another day in East Melbourne I saw Lady Casey, who actually spoke to me, about her car. She spoke to me, the newspaper boy. She came to the news agency to settle her account with the newsagent in her brand new orange coloured Porsche 911 E. “I love the colour of my car,” she told me in a very humble manner.

She was a lovely lady. Wouldn’t it be nice to be able to buy a car for its colour alone, irrespective of the car’s price, I thought to myself. At about that time I started planning and saving money to buy my sports car and this car wasn’t going to be orange and certainly not a Porsche. I will leave this story for the chapter on Counting Cars.

The next story took place in East Melbourne again and it occurred at a later time, and it’s not about cars.

When I was about 18 years of age and too embarrassed to sell newspapers I started working in a fruit shop next to the newsagency. This time I was selling fruit instead of newspapers. The fruit shop was run by two Greek brothers whom I liked. I liked the job as well because the two Greeks let me eat as much fruit as I wanted to. I remember asking them if I could eat some of their fruit. They said: “Eat as much as you like, as long as you don’t eat us.”

This is why I can pick the flavours in wine, because I have tasted every fruit and almost every vegetable there was in the fruit shop.

The customers coming to the fruit shop were as varied as the fruit in the shop. One particular tall professional-

looking male came in every day and every day he bought one apple. His legs made up 75 percent of his overall height. He befriended me by casual conversation. He asked me what my favourite subject was at school. I told him that it was physics. He was impressed with that. Then he told me that he was a psychologist and I was impressed with that. Finally, he asked my name and I answered him in a way a Greek person in Greece would address a professional man and that is you state your surname first, followed by your Christian name. “Germantsis, Olie,” I said. He looked at me from top to bottom, because he was so tall, and said to me “You got problems, boy” and he walked away.

I looked at him and saw that he didn’t close his briefcase and that the solitary apple was holding his briefcase open. His legs were touching together at his knees and his lower legs were spread out in the shape of an isosceles triangle. He walked like John Cleese did in his famous comedy sketch where he portrayed the Minister for Silly Walks. The psychologist could have been a smart man, but he was ignorant of different cultures. I thought he buys an apple each day because he was told that an apple a day will keep the doctor away. Why doesn’t he buy seven apples once a week, I thought to myself? Psychologists think differently!

The pub two doors down from the newsagency showed a different group of men and a few women; they sat in the same positions in the pub every day. I was allowed to sell newspapers in the pub, but barred from drinking beer or any other alcoholic drink. There was a man with a sad-

looking face sitting on a low chair all by himself in the corner of the pub. He bought a newspaper from me every Monday, and he gave me a Tattslotto ticket. He was different from the other pub patrons, so I asked him one day: “Where are you from?”

He said that he was from Wales.

I said “New South Wales.”

And he said “No, Wales.”

I thought to myself why do these people shorten the names of everything? I liked him and he liked me and after many days I found out that he was from Wales in England (schools aren’t the only places for learning). Wales was new to me, so was the Tattslotto lottery. I found out later that he was giving me lottery tickets that were out of date. But one day he gave me something that appeared genuine. He gave me a cricket bat that looked authentic and looked like it could have been used in major cricket matches going by the dents made on it by the hard cricket balls. I wished I kept that bat.

One person gives and another person takes away. The barmaid, a middle aged lady who was serving beer behind the bar, asked me for two pounds (equivalent to four dollars) one day.

“Lend me two pounds, till tomorrow. I will pay you back tomorrow afternoon,” she said.

The next day she wasn't at her usual spot behind the pub's bar. On subsequent enquiries I found out that she collected enough money from everyone in the pub for a one-way ticket to Queensland.

Despite losing two pounds, I was still saving money towards my first sports car.

So, now let's find out how the migrant adults were making money and saving money.

Australia was a bonanza for the newly arrived migrants. You could not stop the impoverished migrants from working and you couldn't make them spend their hard-earned money; initially that is.

Richmond, Collingwood, Burnley and Abbottsford collectively were a hub of industry. There was a large collection of factories such as Vickers Ruwolt, Carlton & United Breweries, the State Electricity Commission, Arnott's Biscuits, Nylex Plastics, McPhersons. Further away from Richmond there were the car manufacturing and car assembling factories, etc. On the smaller scale of factories there were Pelaco, Bryant and May (the match factory), Peters Ice Cream, Rosella, Yarra Falls and many other manufacturers of all sorts of goods. Collingwood was the shoe making centre and Flinders' Lane was the "rag trade" centre. There wasn't a shortage of employers, but there was a shortage of employees, almost all of the factories had signs of "Workers Wanted" plastered on their factory facades. Many factories asked their employees to work overtime and did they work overtime!

I remember when my uncle Vangel brought his niece Leta over from Macedonia and he secured a job for her at Peter's Ice Cream, where he worked for many years. When Leta was able to communicate in broken English, "Vangel" told her to ask for overtime: "Ask the boss to give you overtime," said Vangel.

The boss gave Leta overtime and she worked there many hours per week and for many years until she retired. Leta was a model worker, never missing a day. She gained the management's respect. The management rewarded Leta with a lifetime membership to the Peters Ice Cream annual Christmas party, with all expenses paid by the management. After her retirement the management would chauffeur Leta from her home to the annual Christmas party each year until she wasn't able to attend any more.

Leta amassed a substantial amount of money by working overtime at Peters Ice Cream. Rumour has it that one day on her way home she walked past a house that was being auctioned near her home. While the auction was in progress Leta waved to a person in the auction crowd; her hand waving coincided with the final call from the auctioneer and Leta ended up buying the house. There was no need for financial arrangements, such was her financial position. Leta bought the house with cash money.

On average, our people worked fifteen extra hours per week of overtime. The extra hours were paid at one and a half times the normal rate of pay; Sundays and public holidays were paid at double the rate of normal pay.

Overall, a working couple would bring home three weekly wages. This was a substantial amount of money, much more than the pay of a middle-level management employee. The migrants had an additional advantage over a middle management employee and that was that they were able to save most of their wages because their expenses were minimal. No car expenses, no TV licence, no insurance fees and most importantly no holiday expenses and certainly no dining out expenses. Those who had purchased a house would use their spare time painting or even extending their prized possession instead of going on holidays, so no maintenance fees; what a bonanza.

For those who didn't have a house it wouldn't take them long to buy one. The two greatest incentives for Macedonians for purchasing a house were: no Macedonian wants to pay rent, they didn't want to make the landlord richer; and no Macedonian wants to pay bank interest, they didn't want to make the banks richer.

In many cases migrants, especially Macedonians, bought their houses with cash money. They worked many hours, saved most of their pay and waited until they had enough money to purchase the house outright, without a mortgage. For example, three brothers from our village managed to buy a house for each one of them within two to three years of arriving in Australia. How can this happen, you might ask? Well, they minimised the cost of renting by sharing one house. It was common for two families to rent a small house, and three families to rent a bigger house. And in the extreme case, groups of single men rented houses in

shifts. One shift would sleep in the house while the other shift would be at work.

But the greatest advantage in being able to buy a house was the low purchase price of the houses in the industrial suburbs of Melbourne. Suburbs such as Richmond, where dad bought his first house in the same street where there was a large drycleaning business by the name of Brown Gouge. This stinking factory discharged its used smelly solvents every day at 5.00 pm, forcing the residents in the street to shut the doors and windows of their homes until next morning. One had to put up with smelly and dangerous conditions in order to buy a house at a bargain price in the industrial parts of Richmond. The discomfort and hazardous conditions gave us, the migrants, a foot in the property market.

I will disclose some figures here, which are unbelievable in today's housing market. These figures illustrate that industrial suburbs such as Richmond, Fitzroy and Collingwood were a bargain in this lucky country. The 1950s-70s were the "bonanza" years for house buyers.

1. In 1953 a small house in Kent Street, Richmond, about ten houses away from Brown Gouge dry cleaners, was sold for $600 when the average wage was $1,300 (Prices then were in pounds and I have converted them to dollars. A house then was less than half a year of an average wage.)

2. In 1965 a bigger house in Bennett Street, Richmond, a better part of Richmond and on land that was three times bigger than the land of the house in Kent Street, was sold at a still relative bargain price of $12,000 when the average wage was $3,200 (Again, prices then were in pounds and I have converted them to dollars. A house was a bit less than four years of an average wage). If we included two wages the price of that house was bought for less than two years of an average household income. For a Macedonian couple working overtime that was about one and a half years wages.

3. Now the price of that same house is fourteen times the annual average wage. Today, it is near impossible for a first home buyer to buy that house.

During the 1950s-70s when the houses were at bargain prices, many migrants including my parents' purchased homes in industrial suburbs. This was a stepping stone to better places in Melbourne. After securing a place to live in, no matter how humble, my parents like many other families who had teenage children were preparing themselves for the next onslaught in family life, and that was to marry-off their children.

Marry-off sounds a bit like an expulsion of one's children from the family home, when you say it quickly in one sentence. But the Macedonians from rural parts of the country take marriage very seriously and strive to arrange a marriage which is more of an agreement between two

families rather than two young lovers coming together. It's more like an addition to their family. The engagements and the weddings were major and expensive events in the early 1970s. The prelude to the union of the young couple was even more expensive than the actual wedding reception, which normally hosted around three hundred guests.

So now the preparation for the hunting game begins. Hunting for a lifelong partner was expensive for the parents, exciting for some young lovers, disappointing for others, and downright bewildering for a few.

The parents of eligible girls made sure their daughters were dolled up with the latest dresses and spent time and lots of money on grooming. They presented their daughters like princesses at the hunting-marriage game. The parents of the potential grooms had to make sure their sons appeared to be successful by buying them a new car (a Valiant car was on top of the shopping list if funds were available). Not all families were able to meet those requirements of course, thus the disappointment for some families.

My parents certainly were not able to meet those requirements and it was fortunate for them that I wasn't ready to start the hunting games yet. I participated as an observer only, but a pleasant surprise was waiting for me in the near future.

Before the hunting game began in earnest, a group of us went on a real hunting trip; hunting rabbits. This hunting

trip turned out to be more than a rabbit hunt as you will read in the next chapter.

The Hunting Games

Henry Ford started mass-producing cars in 1913. He made and sold millions of cars at prices that the average American could afford to buy. This opened up the countryside to the city dwellers. Americans could now travel outside their congested and polluted cities and see their vast country.

In Europe after the Second World War, Volkswagen made and sold more cars than Ford. Which allowed Europeans to see all the different countries of Europe and their splendid scenery.

Late December 1965 I turned 18 years of age, and then I bought a Volkswagen Beetle and started to explore my adopted country. Like the Americans and the Europeans who travelled outside their congested cities, I too wanted to get away from our congested city.

I travelled along the Great Ocean Road to a surf beach with my school friend Jack, the one who gave me a surfboard and who introduced me to the great Australian pastime of surfing. Driving to the surf beaches past Geelong became a regular outing for me during weather-suitable weekends. But not with Jack.

I found a better companion than Jack. I had my beautiful girlfriend who, later on, became my equally beautiful wife. Lyn accompanied me during those wonderful days away from Richmond. We travelled quite often in my trusty Volkswagen Beetle, at first mostly short distances just

outside of Melbourne. A drive to Mt Dandenong was my first date with Lyn, when she was just 16 years old.

I enjoyed driving to and around the Dandenongs to see the deciduous trees in their beautiful autumn colours. The same colours on the same species of trees that we had in our region (*Lerinsko*, named after Lerin) back in Macedonia. I also wanted to see the low clouds below the top of Mt Dandenong in winter. Mt Dandenong reminded me so much of our region in Macedonia. The hamlets of Kalorama, Olinda, Sassafras, Monbulk and others that dot the mountain ranges north of Melbourne reminded me of Mala, Lagen, Neret, Bouf and other villages that dot the mountain ranges in what is now north west Greece.

The Dandenongs are forested with walnut trees and chestnut trees and in places like Monbulk we could see strawberry fields as far as the eye could see. I felt like I was in Macedonia, which was forested with walnut trees, chestnut trees and bountiful strawberry fields. The region around Melbourne started to reveal, to me at least, similar geographical features to our region around Lerin. The parallel universe that I thought I found myself in, when I first came to Richmond, seemed to have integrated itself into one universe, containing both countries. Australia shared similar geographical elements with Macedonia, and now I started to feel comfortable in Australia.

During rare cold snaps in winter I could see snow on the Dandenong ranges, but not in quantities to please my snow-starved eyes. Nor did I see the familiar *seeneak* (sin-

yuk) a bluish low-lying cloud that was very common in Macedonia (see-ne-ak means a blue-tinged cloud in Macedonian). For the full measure of snow and the possibility of seeing the *seeneak*, which appears at temperatures below zero degrees Celsius, I had to venture out further, north east of Melbourne in fact.

Several years later I did venture out to the Alpine country in north east Victoria. But not before I and a group of teenagers who arrived in Australia from the above-mentioned Macedonian villages went on a hunting trip. We went somewhere in central Victoria during the middle of winter. We were going to hunt rabbits, just like Elmer Fudd does in the Bugs Bunny cartoons. But as it turned out, the trip was more than a rabbit hunt.

This hunting trip was organized by Pando, an avid hunter. He arranged and supplied most of the equipment: like a tent for all of us, sleeping bags for each person and most importantly a rifle or a shotgun for each of the five or six eager hunters. The others brought their toiletries and whatever else they thought they needed for a weekend of hunting and bonding as it turned out to be.

I was ill-prepared, being the only student, the only non-income earner. I came in my op-shop sourced clothes, which weren't suitable for a sub-zero-degrees Celsius night. Cousin George picked up my brother and myself from our home and drove us in his FB Holden. A befitting Australian car which was designed for Australian conditions and therefore brought us safely and in comfort to a farm

somewhere in the Strathbogie Ranges where Pando had gained permission for us to shoot rabbits.

On our arrival at the hunting ground, Pando stood at the campsite looking like a Sergeant Major dressed in his elaborate hunting outfit. He wore a camel-coloured hunting outfit that had pockets and hooks for every possible accessory; it also had a clear plastic pocket for his hunting license. To top it off, he wore a clear raincoat over his elaborate outfit. The salesman at the sports store who sold him the complete hunting outfit must have had a bonanza day with Pando's purchase. My brother Steve brought the essentials; he brought bacon and eggs and lots of them. I brought nothing but my moustache, which everyone remembers even now nearly sixty years later.

The hunt began in the afternoon when the rabbits came out to eat. I was allotted a shotgun because I told the Sergeant Major I had quick reflexes. And being enlisted in the CMF, I could easily wound and stop the rabbit in its tracks. My brother, who had the 22mm rifle, would take the rabbit out of its misery with one bullet.

Steve and I walked slowly. I had my eyes focused on the ground. I was holding the shotgun pointing at the ground, with my finger on the trigger and safety catch off. Steve held his 22 firmly against his right shoulder ready to aim at the wounded rabbit. A rabbit shot out of its burrow in front of me. I instantly fired the shot gun and at least one pellet disabled the rabbit. Steve finished it off as planned.

Later on another rabbit shot out in front of Steve and this time ran sidewise from us. I discharged the shotgun which got the rabbit but narrowly missed Steve's feet. After that dangerous incident we called it a day and went back to the camp where everyone was back with a good supply of freshly shot rabbits and they had a roaring fire going.

Somebody skinned two rabbits and put them on a make-shift spit. While the rabbits were roasting we engaged in a friendly and humorous conversation around the roaring fire. This turned out to be a typical, friendly, boys-out camping and hunting trip. We were bonding, without realizing it then. For some of us who were planning to get married, this camping trip was a substitute for a "buck's night".

Two coincidental events occurred at the campsite that afternoon. The Sergeant Major decided to drive to the nearest town for more supplies and the local police decided to pay us a visit at the same time. Pando saw the police car coming towards the camp side, but he continued on to the town for his supplies. The police came to check if the roaring fire was attended by anybody.

"Just a routine check, boys," they told us.

After a few jovial exchanges with us, "the innocent looking young men", the policemen left us to continue with our rabbit-on-the-spit meal. Steve, who is always quick with a practical joke, hid Pando's rifle and waited for him to return from his shopping spree.

On his return, the first thing that Pando asked was: “What did the police want?”

Steve told him that they checked our guns and found that his rifle was too powerful and they said it needed a special licence to be used in Victoria. So they confiscated it.

“You have to report at the police station tomorrow morning, if you want your rifle back, they told us."

Well, the Sergeant Major started pacing around the campfire and talking to himself.

“I am sorry, officer. I didn’t know that the rifle needed a licence.” More pacing... “I will get a licence for it straight away.”

It was getting dark by now, the barbequed rabbits on the spit were eaten down to the skeletons, and Steve finally decided to calm the Sergeant Major’s nerves by revealing his rifle.

After the laughter subsided it was time for us to go to sleep. George made himself comfortable in his pink FB Holden, the others zipped themselves into their sleeping bags and squeezed into the tent. I wrapped myself into my sleeping bag and squeezed myself halfway into the tent with my head outside the tent so I could look at the stars all night. My head would stay warm by the fire and my moustache would keep my face warm, I thought to myself.

In the early hours of the morning the temperature dropped to below zero degrees Celsius. Cold enough for a

seeneak to form. I didn't see a *seeneak*, but I saw that the fire turned into a cold grey ash. Not many slept well that night, least of all me. I was shaking all over and my teeth were chattering and the moustache that was supposed to keep my face warm froze and had two icicles hanging from it. Steve cooked his rashes of bacon and eggs to feed us and to warm us, but nobody remembers that. They all remember that Olie's moustache froze that night. Every time I see someone from that hunting group they never fail to mention my frozen moustache.

The next and the most important hunting game for all of us was to take place in Fitzroy Town Hall. Fitzroy Town Hall is a stately, classical Victorian building that belongs in England rather than the industrial suburb of Fitzroy. But once inside the building you could be forgiven for thinking that you are in an English manor.

During the 1960s for several years Macedonian migrants inhabited it every Sunday night for the hunting games (that is the marriage game). The Macedonians from north west Greece came here to hunt for their life-long partners. This marriage hunt, unlike the rabbit hunt, was a serious proposition. The partner that one chose was for life and didn't come with a receipt so you could return her/him back.

"*Abre, stramota e da se ostavat*" ("It is shameful for them to separate"), our parents would say.

The young bride becomes a member of the groom's family, she takes the role of a n*evesta* (bride). A *nevesta* is

the pride of the groom's family. She receives quests, she maintains her in-law's home, she helps with cooking and cleaning. The *svekreva* (mother-in-law) boasts to all her relatives, friends and acquaintances about her *nevesta*.

"Pull lee sho oobavo proo sar nevestata." ("Look how well the bride receives and entertains her guests.")

In most cases the new *nevesta* becomes a domestic aide to her in-laws, but she secretly starts to plan her escape from the in-law's house as soon as she can. This is the main difference between family life in Macedonia and family life in Australia. This is the lucky country where a bribe and her husband can afford to escape the cold grip of the *svekreva* and start their own life in their own home.

The hunt for a *nevesta* wasn't confined to the Fitzroy Town Hall. It included Cathedral Hall in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy and also in the Fitzroy Gardens and later on at picnic grounds around the Melbourne environs.

Hunting for a suitable partner is not as straightforward as you might think. And the hunting starts early, in a subtle way at first. As soon as the girl can reach the mirror on the mantelpiece, her parents start visiting families who have a suitable boy. It also goes the other way as well, families with a young suitable male will start visiting families with a pretty girl and an obedient girl at that. If visiting is awkward or not possible the *stroynitsi* (the matchmakers) are sent in, who, for a pair of socks, will introduce the families to one another. The couple will each be asked in turn.

The girl will be asked: "Y*o sakash?*" ("Do you want him?")

And the boy will be asked: "*Ya sakash?*" ("Do you want her?")

If this procedure didn't culminate in a marriage, then one had the other venues to secure a successful union between two eager young Macedonians. The Fitzroy Town Hall was the most prolific and successful venue for the marriage game. That is, for those Macedonians newly arrived in Australia.

Those were tumultuous years for the Macedonians. The youth were attracted by the new-age sexual revolution and the parents were adhering to their long-established traditional way of life.

I was lucky enough not to fit into the Macedonian algorithm of marriage because I didn't have a job. I was still at school (college); unheard of for a 19-year-old to still be at school. As one cousin of mine from Werribee once commented: "How many times have you failed school, Manoli?"

I enjoy observing people's behaviours and actions. And now, looking back retrospectively, I realise why two particular fathers who I knew paid particular attention to me. One father of a girl whose daughter could reach the mirror on the mantelpiece allowed me to start and drive his Ford Consul for short distances forward and back along Kent Street. He also invited me for dim sims at his fish and chips

shop in Victoria Street, Richmond after school. The other father, who sat on the porch of his house across from our house in Bennett Street and sipped Hospital Brandy (low price brandy) each afternoon, invited me for a shot of Hospital Brandy. He would ask his daughter to serve me the brandy on a fancy serving platter. I enjoyed the free dim sims from one father and I appreciated the Hospital Brandy from the other father. Now, in retrospect, I realised that I was subtly hunted.

My friend Socrates was also hunted by a Greek father. The Greek father spoke about his motorbike and told him that he enjoys riding his motorbike. He told him that he often goes to Geelong for coffee as an excuse to ride his bike. Socrates told me that that's how Greeks befriend you "so they can off-load their daughter on to you".

By the way, Greeks stuck to their nationality, as Macedonians stuck to their ethnicity, when it came to hunting for suitable partners. No Greek family brought their prized daughter to Fitzroy Town Hall.

I wasn't ready for hunting, I was involved in too many other preoccupations: mainly studying, part-time work, driving around in my car, thinking of how to avoid national conscription, socialising with friends. And more importantly, thinking of how I could realise my dream of becoming a racing car driver. This is corny, but I knew that I was going to get killed racing cars and that's why I didn't want to get involved with girls. And then I walked into a trap and I was snagged and fell victim, in a nice way, to the marriage game.

Motor racing in Australia was in its infancy then. It was exciting, it was experimental, and it was dangerous. On average, about ten drivers were killed on racing tracks around the word each year and strangely enough that is what made motor racing so appealing to the car enthusiast. Yes, car enthusiasts are passionate about all aspects involving cars and are willing to risk their lives for the thrill of the sport.

I was hopeful of realising my dream and one day my brother and I had a sliver of a chance of making our dream come true. One day, while we were studying engineering at Swinburne, my brother and I were offered a drive at Calder Park Raceway by a fellow student by the name of John Clark. His family owned a business in the construction industry. So money wasn't a problem for him. John had a Mini Cooper prepared for a motorcross race at Calder. He was going to enter and drive the Mini Cooper in the first race. Steve was going to drive in the second race and I was to drive the last race of the day. Neither Steve nor I had the opportunity to drive the Mini, because John crashed it and essentially destroyed the car at the first turn of the first lap of the Mini Cooper's first race. Fortunately John was not hurt. I will say more about my motor car interests in another chapter. So, for now, let's go back to the safer pursuit of hunting.

Concurrently with the rabbit hunting, George and my brother were each hunting for a partner at Fitzroy Town Hall. And one day they urged me to go one Sunday night with them. I went and in my usual manner I started

observing the whole environment. Outside the Town Hall I could see lots of late model cars, including the prestigious Valiant cars. My Volkswagen Beetle looked out of place there, it looked like it belonged to the janitor.

Walking up the steps leading to the huge doors of the Town Hall, I could tell that I was entering a special venue. There were many parents with their children of all ages and all dressed in their best outfits. Climbing down to the dance floor, I could see separate groups of girls and separate groups of boys around the perimeter of the empty dance floor.

Now the music started, a song by Frank Sinatra signalled the start of dancing, and the boys and girls started pairing off and walking on to the dance floor for a waltz.

I was dazzled and dazed by the ambience of the place. And then I looked up at the gallery above the dance floor and my eyes were met by a sea of owl eyes all focused on the dancing couples below. The owners of the owl eyes had their eyes focused on their daughters on the dancing floor. They were keeping close tabs of who danced with whom. Now the dancing stopped (Frank Sinatra needed a break), the boys thanked the girls for the dance and moved on to another dancing partner.

I took the break from dancing as an opportunity to cross the floor. And that's when I bumped into cousin George who said to me: "Here Olie, dance with this nice girl."

“Okay,” I said.

I held her hand, I put my right hand around her back; she stood there looking shy, and when the music started the shy girl looked up at me and I instantly knew that she was the girl for me. The car racing dream was instantly wiped off from my thoughts by that shy girl. I was going to be a car designer now, a far safer pursuit than driving racing cars.

Many couples met their partners on the dance floor at Fitzroy Town Hall in a similar way that I met my wife, Lyn. They went off and arranged their weddings and lived happily ever after.

In my case, I had to wait until I finished my engineering course, secured a job and then married that beautiful girl. We married five and a half years after meeting and we are still happily married now. During those five and a half blissful years we saw each other at Macedonian picnics, at dances, at weddings and at many outdoor activities such as snow trips, and of course many drives down the surf beaches. Quoting Socrates again, I will say those five and a half were the “best years ever” for me. And better years followed.

The annual picnics provided a sample of old-style Macedonian socialising. Families would go early in the morning to secure a picnic place under the shade of a tree. Mothers would spread the picnic table with home-cooked *zelnic* (pastry), roast chicken and *meze* (finger foods). The live band would set the picnic ground alive with music. I particularly loved the sound of the clarinet.

The engaged couples would pose in their Valiant cars. The drivers of those Valiant cars would be hanging their elbows out of the driver's window showing their muscular upper arms. I had nothing to show but my pretty fiancée. Steve's car, the Mark 1 Sprite, stood out as something special, exotic and foreign. But to the Macedonians parents of those pretty girls who favoured large family cars, the Sprite was not as impressive as a Valiant.

My intended purchase of a Porsche 356 Speedster was met with a ghastly "no" from my future father-in-law, the father of that shy and pretty girl. I enquired and arranged to buy the Speedster. I took it for a test drive to show it to Lyn in Preston. A Porsche Speedster for $1,100, the sister car of the Porsche 550 (James Dean's car). On seeing the car, Lyn's father said: "Don't buy that, you can't fit a picnic table in that small car."

I didn't buy the Speedster, not because of Lyn's father's instruction, but because I made a terrible blunder of not leaving a holding deposit on that amazing car. When I drove it back to Toorak to settle the purchase, the owner had tears in her eyes and she told me that she couldn't part with her beloved car. So, no sale. I missed out on a bargain of a lifetime. That car is now a rare classic. I regret not leaving a holding deposit.

Going back to the time before the picnics, freshly arrived migrants met in the Fitzroy Gardens on Sunday afternoons, where life was simple and joyful. People were "simply" happy. I remember girls in colourful dresses

holding colourful spinning toys on a stick running around and skipping around the green lawns and around the flower-packed beds of the Fitzroy Gardens. As I look further back to then, it seems that times were better, simpler, happier, almost magical in those good old days.

But as this is not a romantic book, I will stop here and I will move on to my best pastime, my hobby, cars.

Counting Cars

This chapter will be on self-indulgence. If you are not interested in cars and in technological things, this might be the time for you to do something more important or interesting than listening to me talking about cars. You could go and get your haircut perhaps, because that's how long it will take me to finish talking about cars and talking about driving cars.

Now, because you are still here, I will continue with my chapter on cars.

Remember when I was abruptly interrupted by the girl next door who sat beside me whilst I was counting cars outside our house in Kent Street, Richmond? Well, I wasn't just counting cars, I was actually researching which make of car was the best car in Australia. Having counted many batches of cars over several days, I found that Holdens were the best cars because seven out of ten cars that I counted were Holdens. The other cars that I saw were Ford Consuls, Ford Prefects, Vauxhall Victors, a single Standard Ten and Volkswagen Beetles.

I didn't think this was a good sample of cars to draw a valid conclusion on which brand of car was the best. So I started to do a more thorough investigation by looking at cars from the engineering point of view. I will try to make my fascination and involvement with cars interesting by including stories that are related to me wanting to be an Aussie.

I mentioned several times before that I was saving to buy my favourite sports car. Well, by the time of my eighteenth birthday I had saved $2,000.00 to buy a good secondhand 1954 MG TF 1500 for $1,900.00 from City Motors in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. When I mentioned my intention of buying a sports car to my dad, he firmly told me that we need a family car.

“Buy a family car,” he said. He instructed me to buy a sedan.

So being an obedient son, I purchased a 1959 Volkswagen Beetle for $700.00 as our first ever family car. Well, with that Beetle I travelled everywhere with Lyn. It was a terrific and reliable car. I even took dad and mum to Sale in Gippsland to visit mum’s cousin *Mitre* several times.

About a year after I purchased the Beetle I damaged its left-hand headlight during a minor accident that I had. Shortly after the minor accident my uncle George, his wife and his two young daughters arrived in Melbourne from Perth, Western Australia to visit us and he also wanted to visit his wife’s relatives who lived on a banana farm in Queensland.

“Can you take us to Queensland, *Manoli*?*”* (he calls me by my Macedonian name).

It was more of an order than a request and family orders are obeyed. Actually, I wanted to go on this long adventurous trip to Queensland for my own pleasure; it was a major trip in those days. So, three adults and two children

in a Volkswagen Beetle, with a broken headlight, a tank full of petrol, with no other preparation done to the car, set off for east Queensland where the banana farm was. I was a little apprehensive about the car's ability to take us all the way to Queensland and back, but my uncle reassured me when he said: "This is a German car; it will take us there."

The Beetle took us there and back without any mechanical mishaps. Fearing my uncle's retribution the Beetle carried a crate of bananas back for a good measure. I didn't drive at night, by the way. What an amazing drive that was by an amazing little car. I have recently recounted that trip to one of my uncle's daughters, who by now is in her early sixties. But she wasn't at all moved by the Beetle's achievement as she hopped into her late model Audi A5 and roared away.

One more thing about that basic but rugged car. It hasn't got a fuel gauge, as most people don't know. To check the petrol level, one has to look into the petrol tank, which is easy to do. One late afternoon I arranged to take Lyn out to the movies, but I didn't know if I had enough petrol in order to get there and back. I looked into the petrol tank, but it was too dark for me to see in it. So I went into the house for a box of matches. I lit a match stick and held it above the open filler pipe.

This is embarrassing for a chemical engineering student to admit – I should have known better. The petrol vapour caught fire and started burning with a gentle candle-like flame around the petrol filler pipe. I put the flame out by

covering the filler pipe with my hand. I was extremely lucky not to have been blown to pieces. A slight breeze or a lower petrol temperature would have created a more favourable air to petrol ratio for a devastating explosion. Please don't try this at home.

By now my brother Steve had his Austin Healey Sprite Mark 1, the one he bought from the car wreckers, completed and ready for a test drive at the Kew Boulevard, our "private race track". The reconstruction of the car makes interesting reading in itself, which will be told in another chapter. So, for now let's go back to the first drive of the Sprite.

As we walked towards the Sprite, which was parked outside our house in Bennett Street, I saw two policemen in an unmarked car parked opposite our house. They were not wearing their police hats, so that they wouldn't be noticed by us whilst they were waiting for their revenge. They were the same two policemen who took us to court, remember that day?

Steve was driving the Sprite. I told him to drive slowly and not to cross the double lines at the end of Bennett Street like we always do. We drove to The Boulevard, the police car followed us and the policemen expected us to start speeding once we were on our "private racing track".

The Boulevard was considered a highway without a posted speed limit, but one could still be fined for dangerous driving though, as judged by the police.

At the start of The Boulevard, we did something that was unexpected by the police. Steve parked his Sprite neatly on the side of The Boulevard and then we proceeded to walk safely along the footpath. The policemen sat in their parked car behind the Sprite, scratching their heads for a while, then they decided they couldn't book us for dangerous walking and drove off and never bothered us again.

Steve, Socrates and I enjoyed driving and racing our cars, especially when I had a Sprite Mark 2. The one I bought from the wreckers, missing a bonnet. I fashioned a lightweight bonnet for it from fiberglass, lightening the car by about 30 kg. After that, even Socrates couldn't keep up with my Sprite in his brand new MGB. Socrates was still mastering the fine points of driving cars.

Here is another interesting driving episode on The Boulevard – between me in my Mark 2 Sprite (lightened), Socrates in the more powerful MGB, and a new guy by the name of Alyster in his even more powerful Sunbeam Alpine Tiger with its 3.5 litre V8 engine.

Socrates and I were trying different tyre pressures in our cars to induce understeer for a better cornering/ steering feel in the cars. I still remember the tyre pressures we pumped the tyres to, 17 psi (pounds per square inch) in the front tyres and 24 psi in the rear tyres. We set off for a test run at The Boulevard. Whilst we were driving along Victoria Street, Richmond, Alyster, the man with the Sunbeam Tiger, who had a position of responsibility (and

could take time off at his will) in one of the factories in Victoria Street, saw us driving past. He jumped into his Tiger and drove it briskly to join us for a quick spin around The Boulevard. At the Richmond end of The Boulevard, I could see the Sunbeam was a few metres behind us.

We started our test run with me leading. Socrates, who was still learning the finer points of driving, followed closely behind me. I had instructed Socrates to watch my tails lights and to brake at the same places that I braked before each curve. Initially the Tiger caught up with us and was close behind the MG. But as we drove further, around several curves of The Boulevard, the Tiger started to lag behind. I could see in my rear view mirror that the Tiger was slowed by excessive understeer.

We finished our run and waited for Alyster at the Heidelberg end of The Boulevard. Alyster wasn't too far behind, but remember he had a super car compared to our cars. Alyster rushed up to us and asked: "What have you got in those cars?"

Socrates, who was excited that he learned a new "set-up" procedure for cars answered: "17 in the front and 24 in the rear."

Alyster looked puzzled. He didn't understand what Socrates meant. And I could tell that Alyster didn't know how to drive his Sunbeam Alpine Tiger; Alyster's white-topped shoes told me that he was more a "poser" and not a real car guy.

One more short story about cars. This story is about “Steve’s corner”.

There was another Richmond Tech teenager by the name of Lorenzo, who lived in Bennett Street and drove a Holden FC, badly. He would often join us for drives around The Boulevard with Steve leading in his Mark 1 Sprite, Lorenzo second in his Holden, and me following in my under-powered Beetle.

I could see that Lorenzo was forcibly steering the Holden from one curve into another curve and causing the Holden to roll badly, to the point of losing control. Lorenzo needed a driving lesson, by none other than the capable and brave driver, Steve. The driving lesson would be in Steve’s newly purchased second-hand but “hot” Hillman Imp GT. A great little car; Gordon Murray, the great Formula One designer of the 70s, has one. The Imp had an all-aluminium slant engine placed way behind the rear axle, making the short wheelbase car a horrendous oversteer and therefore difficult to drive. But Steve was up to the task.

The day for Lorenzo’s lesson came one Sunday afternoon. Steve in the driver’s seat, Lorenzo in the passenger’s seat, the Imp GT at the Richmond end of The Boulevard facing a long downhill straight with a 180-degree right hand curve waiting for Steve’s professional oversteer corrections.

The Imp jumped into action and sped towards the first curve, where Steve braked hard in a straight line just before entering the curve, as he should have. According to Steve

the left-hand wheel locked over a large leaf on the road and the car skidded out of control towards the curb. The left front wheel of the Imp hit the curb, but it couldn't climb over it. So it acted as a pivot point causing the rear of the car to swing like a pendulum and to jump the kerb. Now the car was over the narrow footpath, going backwards and starting to speed-up along the grassy decline. The flimsy passenger door swung open as the Imp rocked and rolled backwards along the tree-lined grassy slope. Steve had full control of the runaway car and yelled at Lorenzo: "Shut the door."

Lorenzo closed the car's door just in time to narrowly avoid hitting the passing trees on the passenger's side of the Hillman Imp GT. Fortunately the hot over-steering Imp was not damaged, Lorenzo was physically OK too. But he didn't come back for a follow up driving lesson, a lesson on how to negotiate "Steve's corner".

I think Lorenzo was traumatised by the unfortunate driving mishap at The Boulevard in Steve's Hillman Imp. From that time on, Lorenzo kept away from us. He went on to Swinburne Institute of Technology, completed a Diploma in Civil Engineering, and was employed by Richmond City Council. And then he started installing speed humps on the streets of Richmond, and I think he was involved in painting double lines and posting a speed limit of 50 kph on the whole length of the Kew Boulevard.

I still can't understand how we were not hurt driving those unsafe cars at dangerously fast speeds. And above all

I can’t believe how our parents were unaware of our risky activities. Sorry to quote Socrates again, but they were “Tumultuous, dangerous and because of that they were great times.” There will be more discussion about cars in the next chapter, but in that chapter I will talk about the engineering and scientific aspect of cars.

It might be time for you to put some meat pies in the oven.

Things We Made, Things We Did

Two young men had some spare time on their hands. One man asked the other man: “What are you going to do in your spare time?”

“I think I will make myself comfortable in my favourite chair and I will read a good book,” answered the other man.

“What are you going to do in your spare time?” asks the first man.

“I will go into my shed and I will make a nail,” he answered.

The first man read his book and the second man made a nail. Now they asked one another again.

“What will you do now?” asked one of them.

“I will read another book,” he answered.

The other man said that he will make another nail.

You can’t stop people from doing what they want to do, or what they want to make. If you want proof of that just look at how many books there are in the libraries and look at how many nails and other things there are in the Bunnings warehouses. The man who made the nail helped start the industrial revolution and look how far he has advanced mankind. The man who read his book helped the civilisation of mankind and now look how civilised, healthy and comfortable we are. I was a boy who wanted to make

nails, figuratively speaking. And now that I am an old man I still enjoy making nails, figuratively speaking.

Richmond Technical school taught me how things work and provided me with the facilities to make nails and other useful things. Listed below are brief descriptions of some of the things students in technical schools made.

1. In Woodwork they learned to sharpen chisels, plane blades and such. They learned how to maintain all the carpentry tools. With those tools they made a pencil case, a fruit bowl and a coffee table.

2. In the Sheet Metal workshop they learned how to solder sheets of metal together and they learned how to bronze-weld using oxy-acetylene welding equipment. They made oil cans and they joined sections of downpipes together.

3. In the machine shop they learned how to cut and shape metal and how to make things out of metal. The machine shop was equipped with lathes, shaping machines, drill stands, grinders and all sorts of hand tools. A student could make a whole car if he wanted to. My brother nearly made a car; this comes later.

The machine shop was my favourite workshop, students called it “turning and fitting”. Because that is precisely what they did there. They turned metal on the lathe and they made things that fitted together to make tools such as a soft metal hammer (I still have it at home), a

G-clamp used to clamp parts together (I lost it), a bottle car jack (I wish I kept it).

The bottle car jack deserves more page space here because it was a proper engineering project. The body of the car jack was made out of cast iron and it was made by pouring molten iron into a casting mould at a foundry in Richmond. We went to the foundry and watched the casting of the bottle car jack. Back in the school's turning and fitting workshop, we cut a "square-female" thread into the body of the car jack. And then we turned a round shaft and cut a matching "square-male" thread onto it to complete the car jack that could lift a full-size car. In addition to the mandatory items made at school, my brother and I made our personal toys with the blessing of the teachers at the senior apprentices' school. We were in a tech-nerd's paradise.

Before the age of 18 my brother Steve purchased a non-running Austin Healey Sprite Mark 1. He paid the wreckers $240.00 for it and he proceeded to repair it and make it roadworthy. We dismantled its engine and brought the crankshaft to the senior tech for it to be ground by the apprentices. The crankshaft has seven journals, and seven apprentices ground one journal each and each journal was ground to a different diameter. This caused additional complexities for us in reconditioning the engine, but we eventually completed the engine. We managed to put the car together and we spray-painted it as well. This was proof that one could make a car at Richmond Tech.

More specific details about completing the car could increase the risk of losing my readers at this point. So I will move forward to a more people-related incident involving the rigorous roadworthy checking and registration of Steve's Sprite at the VicRoads centre, which was located in Lygon Street, Carlton.

A car without previous registration records, like the Sprite that Steve bought from the wreckers without any official papers, had to go through a thorough inspection over a dugout pit in the floor of a workshop at VicRoads in Lygon Street.

The date for the full inspection of the car was prearranged, the Austin Healey Sprite was ready to go. I drove the car as Steve didn't have his driver's licence yet. On the way to the inspection pit, I noticed that the car wasn't running freely, it was reluctant to go. The brakes started to lock, that is the brakes were "on" even when I wasn't pressing the brake pedal. The roadworthy inspector motioned me to drive the reluctant Sprite over the inspection pit. I had to use almost all of the power that the little car could muster to bring the car over the pit. While the car was stationary, the brakes had a bit of time to cool down while the inspector was giving it a health check.

"Off you go," he calls out after the health check.

But the little Sprite wasn't free from its jammed brakes and therefore not ready to go without the extra revving of the engine. I managed to drive the Sprite away from the inspection pit and I parked it as soon as I could. The

roadworthy inspector didn't notice that the car had faulty brakes and unbelievably he gave us a roadworthy certificate for a car with faulty brakes. This was after a thorough inspection over the VicRoads roadworthy inspection pit. I couldn't believe it.

It wasn't only full-size cars that we restored and worked on. Carmelo and I made model aeroplanes powered by small two-stroke glow plug engines. The glow plug engines didn't need a spark plug or a distributor to power the engine. They required an external battery to heat the platinum wire in the glow plug. The hot wire ignites the volatile fuel mixture that was called ether, a mixture of methanol, nitromethane and oil. After a few flicks of the engine's propeller with my finger the engine would start spinning. Starting the little engine was done in a similar way to how the early propeller driven air force planes were started.

We flew the planes by a hand-held control device made of two fishing lines. We flew the planes in large overhead circular orbits. By holding the lines steady we kept the planes flying in a circle. By moving the control handle sideways and thus controlling the ailerons of the tiny planes, we could make the planes go up or down. It took great skill to make the aeroplanes skim the ground and then make them climb up again.

We flew our planes on the school's oval after school hours. The aeroplanes were amazing. We made them out of balsa wood according to our designs. We shaped the balsa

wood into the form of an aeroplane, we sanded them smooth and brushed them with a substance called “dope” to harden the surface of the planes so we could rub them to a smoother finish for a better aerodynamic performance.

We taught ourselves about the profile of the wings, which gives the aeroplane its lift, we learned about the attack angle which also creates lift, and we learned about the “stall” angle of aeroplanes. The stall angle is critical, it must not be exceeded. Because if it is exceeded, it causes the plane to stall and to fall out of the sky.

We learned about the aerodynamics of planes and cars with the help of one of our maths teachers, who was a car enthusiast himself. He introduced us to the formula for the coefficient of drag, which indicates how efficiently a car or a plane can move through the air. I remember him emphasising that if you want to double the top speed of a car you need to increase the engine power by a factor of eight. Wow, this was fascinating, how was speed related to engine power? I wanted to know more about this relationship and I eventually found out when I was studying engineering.

They were amazing years for science and engineering students. The arrival of Donald Campbell’s stunning Bluebird at Lake Eyre in South Australa in 1964 could not have been better timed. The stunning Bluebird, a streamlined car, set a land speed record of 403 miles per hour (mph) for cars. The car’s jet engine had over 3,000 kW of power and the coefficient of drag was 0.16; igniting

further interest about our math teacher's above-mentioned statements. The wheels and tyres of the Bluebird were specially designed by Dunlop, the tyre manufacturer, to withstand the enormous centrifugal forces.

We were studying physics, maths and engineering at school and out of school hours. And the whole world was engrossed in the space race between America and Russia; television news in the evening always included a space race segment.

Those tiny glow-plug engines could spin up to 20,000 revolutions per minute. What a great engine to connect directly to the rear wheel of a model car and to see how fast it would go, I thought to myself. I made a 1/8 scale model of my dream car, the Jaguar E Type (my version of the Bluebird). I made the wheel out of a round piece of aluminium on the school's lathe and fitted on it a rubber tyre from one of my aeroplanes and I fixed the wheel on to the E Type.

The engine started with the first pull of the zip starter that was also made with the school's lathe. But in no time at all the rubber tyre expanded under the centrifugal force created by the spinning wheel. The tyre flew off the wheel, damaging the right rear mudguard of my E- Type Jaguar.

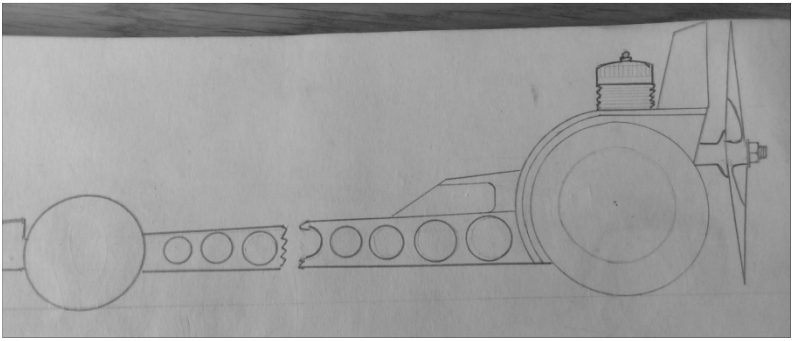
Undeterred I wanted to use that glow plug engine on a propeller driven car. So I made a rudimentary chassis and I attached four small wheels on it. I secured the propeller fitted engine at the back of the rudimentary four wheeled car. I started the engine and let the car go, hoping to see the

chassis-with-wheels set a new land speed record for model cars.

Disappointment was immediate as I watched the chassis-with-wheels roll and eventually destroy itself. Confirming Newton's third law of motion which states "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction". What a wonderful practical demonstration of Newton's third law. The propeller wanted to go one way and the engine together with the chassis went in the opposite direction. Had the chassis been heavy enough, my propeller-driven car would have worked and it would have moved forward and it would have accelerated according to Newton's second law of motion. The second law of motion states: The rate of change of momentum of a body is proportional to the force causing that change in the momentum. From this relationship one can derive the equation F = ma (F stands for force, m stands for mass and a stands for acceleration). This equation is music to the ears of a car enthusiast because it relates the force of the car's engine to the acceleration of a car, and car enthusiasts love acceleration.

My brother and I continued making model cars, including a basic model racing car track that was set around the garden bed in our backyard. We also entered an international model car competition, which nearly landed me with a car designing job with General Motors Holden.

Steve took a different direction and he made a small sailboat for himself that he enjoyed using. I also made something different, not involving cars as usual.



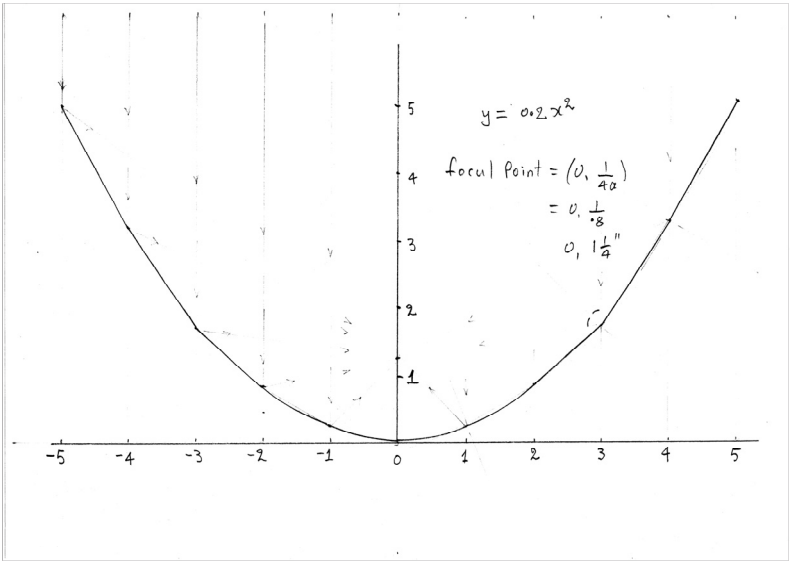
A sketch of a propeller driven model car powered by a two-stroke engine.

The same maths teacher who talked about the coefficient of drag introduced us to quadratic equations and parabolic graphs during maths classes. The parabolic graph, together with its focal point, struck a chord with me when the maths teacher said that parallel rays of light entering a parabolic mirror will reflect back and focus at the focal point within the mirror.

At that moment I had a brilliant thought and I wasted no time making a parabolic dish that would demonstrate that concept. I went to the apprentices' school and asked the teacher if his students could panel beat for me a parabolically shaped dish out of aluminium about 200mm in diameter. The teacher was happy to oblige as he was always looking for interesting objects for his students to make.

I did notice that they had knights' armour that they made displayed on the walls of their workshop. This showed me that they can panel beat anything. I polished the inside

of the aluminium parabolic dish that the apprentices made for me and I made it shine like a mirror.



A sketch of a parabolic dish (with dimensions in inches) for the motor mechanic apprentices to panel beat the dish out of aluminium for me.

The next step for me was to make a Stirling hot air engine during the turning and fitting classes. I enjoyed turning the relatively large brass flywheel and making the connecting rod, piston and the finned cylinder (you must look up the Stirling engine online). I mounted the engine in the parabolic dish with its cylinder head at the focal point where the sun's rays were focused and thus heated the air in the engine's cylinder. Well, to my amazement the Stirling hot air engine worked. A very old engine design powered by solar energy – a new age energy form, this was amazing.

There will be more descriptions about solar powered cars in the next chapter, but now let's move on to another interesting contraption that I made at home and then we will check if those meat pies in the oven are ready.

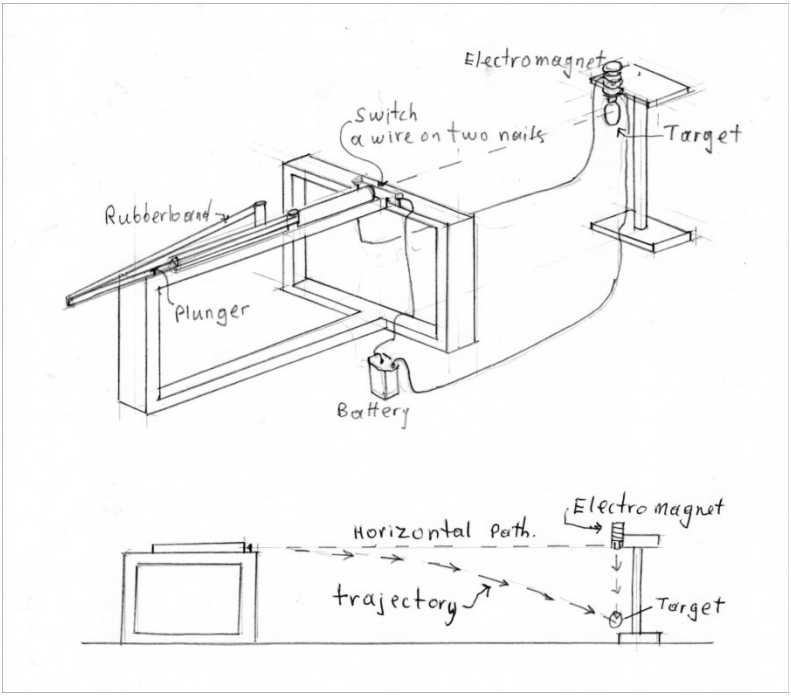
If you think that the school's curriculum centred around physics and maths relating to cars you would be wrong. Physics and cars are what I concentrated on, because that is what I liked. The school covered all academic subjects, sports and activities with the exception of debates, something that private schools were concentrating on, presumably because they were training their students for a socially interactive life.

Our school was training students for a technological workforce, and it succeeded, as indicated by the 80 per cent of the final year students who went on and studied engineering. Richmond Tech succeeded in preparing its students for a technological world because the teachers had practical work experience in the real world and they liked what they were teaching.

After school there was a very popular science show on TV called Why Is It So? which I tried to watch as often as I could. Professor Julius Sumner Miller was an excellent presenter and demonstrator of scientific concepts on his show and he was able to engage students with his love for physics.

During one of his TV shows he demonstrated that horizontally moving objects fall towards the centre of the earth at the same rate as objects that were initially at rest.

He had made a contraption and demonstrated it on his science show. I was so impressed by that demonstration that I made a similar device to the professor's device at home and my device worked as well, again proving the concept that the professor explained.



An apparatus that demonstrates a moving object falls towards the centre of the Earth at the same rate as another object that was initially at rest. The lower diagram shows the vertical component of the trajectory, which is the same path taken by the target that was initially at rest.

You too can make a similar device that proves that all objects fall towards the centre of the earth at the same

rate; then you can consider yourself an experimental physicist and an engineer.

This is what you need:

1. A long round tube, 25mm in diameter and about 1/2 metre long.

2. A small round object to be your projectile, e.g. a marble, a ball bearing, or a small dowel.

3. A strong rubber band so you can force the projectile along the tube at speed.

4. An electromagnet, made by winding lots of insulated electrical wire around an iron nail, a nine volt battery and a length of electrical wire that will act as a rudimentary switch to switch off the electromagnet.

5. A target, a small light object that the electromagnet can hold. You could use a piece of wood with a small nail in it so that the electromagnet can hold the piece of wood.

6. A bench or a frame to mount the channel horizontally and to attach the rubber band.

7. A stand to hold the electromagnet at the same height as the channel, about 1 metre away from it.

Method of operation: set up the equipment as shown on the diagram:

Attach the stripped wires loosely over the end of the channel so they don't slow the projectile as it passes the rudimentary switch.

Pull back the rubber band or the spring and watch the projectile hit the target.

You might have to adjust the distance between the target and the end of the channel.

You might have to experiment with the number of windings in order to make a strong enough magnet to hold the target.

I hope you will persevere with the experiment and you will feel the joy of success and get an understanding of what experimental physicists and what engineers do.

This practical hands-on type of teaching by Professor Miller and by the teachers at Richmond Tech engaged me and taught me not only physics but financial maths as well – perhaps the most important and beneficial maths lesson of all. It was during form 3 when the maths teacher taught us how to work out problems dealing with money.

Hire purchase was a very common method of buying and paying for goods during the booming 60s. With hire purchase, the purchaser makes a small initial payment, a deposit, and agrees to pay the rest of the purchase price over a period of time with regular payments. The deposit

plus the regular payments always added up to more than the sticker price of the item. We completed many such calculations for various goods that people bought on hire purchase. And we were able to express the extra cost as a percentage of the original price. The extra cost was outrageous, both as an amount and as a percentage.

The maths teacher encouraged us to pay for goods in full, to avoid the added cost.

Then the maths teacher introduced his class to a new financial term. He introduced the term “depreciation”, which means reduction in value. And he showed us how to calculate the reduction of value due to the depreciation of an item.

New manufactured items depreciate with time, usually by about 15-20 per cent per year. I saw the depreciation as a gain for me, not as a loss. I could now buy a used car at a much-reduced price. For example, a five-year-old car depreciating at 15 per cent each year would cost less than half of its original price. Purchasing my cars after they had depreciated by more than 50 per cent has saved me a substantial amount of money over many years of car ownership. Four-five years is the “half-life” of a car, in terms of money. That is a $60,000 car devalues to $30,000 in one half-life; it goes down to $15,000 in another half-life. So you can buy a $60,000 car for $15,000 when it is eight-ten years old – what a bargain.

Back To School

Fifty years on I can still see my chemical engineering lecturer standing in the middle of the dining room of the Tower Hotel in Burwood Road, Hawthorn, where the chemical engineering graduates gathered for an informal farewell over lunch. In addition to the usual rhetoric that is spoken at such gatherings, the lecturer uttered the phrase: “Don’t be surprised if some of you will end up teaching.”

Not me, I thought to myself. I studied chemical engineering so that I could make things. I wanted a job where I could design, make and test things.

Just a bit more than 14 years from the time that I came to Australia, I found myself in a technical school classroom teaching mathematics to a group of girls.

Ten of those fourteen years were taken up by me studying, which left four years for me to design, make and test interesting things. I did design interesting things, made and tested various things such as weapon systems at the Defence Standards Laboratories in Maryborough. Later on, I worked at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) where I designed and set up experiments for the chemical engineering students to run and to write reports on. I also worked on a project for the Environmental Protection Authority where I designed and made a small cyclone for separating dust particles found in chimneys of polluting factories.

I enjoyed the work at both establishments, but I decided to take up secondary teaching for a few years whilst my own children were growing up. And then, I thought, I will return to my favourite vocation of engineering. There were other reasons for this career change, which are not relevant to the theme of this book, so I won't discuss the other reasons for the career change right now. The theme of this book is about me getting to grips with multiculturalism, about fitting into what at first appeared to me an entirely different country.

The teaching profession of this different country availed itself as another area for observation and analysis. Teaching the subject matter is standard throughout most schools, but the social aspects vary from school to school and from suburb to suburb. So now I will describe some relevant social interactions between students and staff at the various schools that I taught at.

Schools are places of personal interactions foremost and the teaching of concepts and skills is a secondary outcome and it seems to be a byproduct of those interactions. Before I go any further with personal interactions during my teaching years, particularly at technical schools, I will describe the situation that the Victorian Department of Education was facing during the mid-1960s and 1970s.

The children of the post-war generation, the baby-boomers, reached schooling age and presented a wave of students who would pass through the educational system

in the course of the next 30 years. The Victorian Government began recruiting and training teachers to fill the shortage of traditionally trained teachers. The high schools absorbed the traditionally trained teachers, but the technical schools needed teacher-trained tertiary educated professionals for the academic subjects and teacher-trained tradespeople for the trade subjects. The teacher training was hastily conducted at the Hawthorn Teachers' College over a period of one year; two days per week of theory at the college with the other three days taken up by the trainee teachers actually teaching in the classrooms of allocated schools.

In some cases, trainee teachers were put in front of a blackboard before their theoretical teacher training began. Additionally, in a desperate attempt to fill the teacher shortage, the Victorian Government recruited teachers from America, which added another layer of confusion to the teaching profession.

I started classroom teaching at Ringwood Technical School in mid-March 1974, shortly after the White Australia policy was abolished by the Labor Government (this is significant). I was in front of a blackboard before my theoretical lectures at Hawthorn Teachers College started. This was not the ideal introduction into teaching, especially teaching mathematics to a class of form 3 girls who normally don't like studying maths.

Fortunately for me, the girls were well behaved and appeared to be interested in what I was teaching them,

because as with many girls of that age group they wanted to gain my attention; the attention of a young male teacher. So they actually attempted the maths problems that I set out for them. This was a great start into teaching for me.

They also liked to play practical jokes on me. One such prank they used to do was to move my desk at the edge of the rostrum. So if I leaned on the desk with my full weight, the desk would topple over and they would have a good laugh.

I was always careful not to lean on my desk.

I got on very well with my obedient maths class. I established a good rapport with them. The rapport was further strengthened after an unfortunate incident that had taken place with my teaching supervisor and the girls. My supervisor from Hawthorn Teachers College arranged to observe my teaching method one day. The lecturer, whose name was Olivia May, had to change the date of the prearranged observation date for some reason and she left a note on my desk informing me of the change and that she would see me next Thursday. The note read: “Olie, I will see you on Thursday at 10.00am … Olivia."

The girls read the note before I saw it, because they were in the classroom before me to rearrange the position of my desk. Well, the following Thursday at 10.00am they were waiting for Olivia to walk into my classroom. A middle-age lady, who looked worn out and overwhelmed by her stressful job, walked into my classroom. And then, all of

sudden, she hears a chorus-like loud voice: “Gee, Mr Germantsis, we thought you had better taste than that.”

Olivia, the professional and experienced person that she was, said nothing. She walked backwards out of the classroom, she shut the door behind her, and never came back to observe my teaching method. A different lecturer assessed my practical teaching method.

The teacher training lectures started after I started teaching at Ringwood Technical School, as I mentioned before. And they were more interesting and entertaining than they were useful in terms of preparing mature, work-experienced professionals from many different backgrounds.

The lecturers at the Teachers’ College were preparing us to engage classes of non-interested school children. But they themselves were struggling to engage us into their specialist subjects.

For example, the lecturer who was presenting a unit on psychology and was younger than all of us “trainee teachers”, and her name was Wednesday (an unusual name to older traditionalists like us), had me in awe with her knowledge of medical and psychological terminologies. But the trainee teacher seated next to me, who was running a milk bar during the day, didn’t show any interest in her subject. He found her lectures on psychology the ideal place and time to catch up with some much-needed sleep. He snored away as young Wednesday continued to impress me

and the rest of the class with her knowledge of psychology. She was too polite to wake the rude milk-bar owner.

The psychology unit was optional and I completed it with an acceptable level of success and it rekindled memories of the tall psychologist whom I met in the fruit shop back in East Melbourne.

But the next optional subject that I enrolled in was new to me, I had not heard of it before, it was on existentialism. I was looking forward to learning about existentialism and I even read the prescribed book, written by Jean-Paul Sartre, before the lectures on existentialism started.

The lecturer presenting the unit on existentialism wanted to make the lessons as authentic as possible. So he held the first lecture at his unit in Hawthorn, and asked us to bring our favourite drink. I brought my home-made red wine, and others brought various other drinks.

The lecturer began the lesson by opening the window of his unit. And whilst doing that he turned around and told someone in the class to be quiet, even though nobody was speaking. He continued with the lesson by saying: “That’s what an existentialist would say. Existentialists do what they want to do and they say what they want to say.” This was a charade; he wasn’t convincing enough for me, I didn’t think he was a genuine existentialist.

Later on, he spoke to each person in turn. When he came to me, he asked to taste my wine and stated a predictable cliché. “This wine needs to be buried in the

ground for a couple of years," as he was holding a glass of gin and tonic in his left hand. For me this was further evidence that he wasn't a genuine existentialist because I didn't think he knew much about wine, the gin and tonic betrayed him. I was more of an existentialist than he was because I did what I wanted to do.

And that is that when it came to writing an essay on Sartre's book as part of my assessment for this elective unit I painted a water colour scene to describe my feelings about the subject instead of writing an essay of several pages about my understanding of existentialism. The charade continued. The lecturer now incorporated my painting into his lesson by presenting my painting to his class via a formal unveiling.

The Teachers' College lecturers were not prepared nor knew what to expect when they were tasked with training us, mostly older, well-educated and experienced professionals, during that teacher recruitment period. Some trainee teachers had law degrees, others had partially completed medicine courses. There was a horde of engineers, and I personally knew of two trainees who had PhDs in science. Training these professionals was very different to training young and eager teacher cadets straight from university without any practical workplace experience.

An example that illustrates my point was when a lecturer asked me to present a lesson in a foreign language to her English as a Second Language class. The lecturer was

the wife of a state politician whose constituency comprised a substantial percentage of ethnic Greeks and she had a rudimentary knowledge of the Greek language. And that is why she asked me to present the lesson in Greek. I sensed that she wanted to sit-in on my class presentation and to bask in her superiority over her students.

I prepared a lesson on the complete alphabet, but on the Macedonian alphabet. The students would learn how to pronounce each letter of the alphabet, they would write simple words that started with each letter of the alphabet, and they would attempt to read the words aloud. The students paid attention, they wrote thirty-one words, each one of them starting with a different letter of the Macedonian alphabet.

When it came to reading the words aloud, one of the students lost her cool and lashed out at me. “I don’t want to learn this stupid language.”

I questioned her by saying: “*Ne te rasbraak, sho reche?”* (I didn’t understand you, what did you say?)

The lecturer was impressed with my one hour “foreign language presentation” and thanked me warmly, but in a language that I didn’t understand, so I replied to her: “*Pro stee meh, ne te rasbraak?*” (“Forgive, I didn’t understand you.”)

The politician’s wife fell off her high horse and I think it was then that she realised how difficult it is for a student from a foreign country to learn a new language. She was

expecting a lesson based on the Greek language where she thought that she might understand part of the lesson.

Most importantly, the Teachers' College did not prepare us for the most important aspect of teaching, and that was classroom management. Without classroom control one could not teach subjects that students didn't want to study and certainly not in a room that they felt imprisoned in. Shepherding sheep in my village was a better preparation for controlling a herd of unruly and energetic children.

My next school, Macleod Technical School, my first school after the completion of my training year, presented me with an unforeseen classroom management situation. A misbehaviour by a class of school kids required an on-the-job solution. I was teaching a year 7 science class; the lesson was centred around the use of a microscope. To give my students an authentic experience with the use of the microscope, I arranged to take the class of 22 pupils out of the school grounds, walk them across the main road and then across an unfenced railway line to a nearby reserve. The reserve had a pond where each student would take a sample of pond water for observation and hopefully they would see living microorganisms under the microscope.

On the return trip, a train was approaching our crossing point. I instructed the class to line up away from the railway and to wait for the train to pass. All 22 students grouped together and waited for the train as instructed. I felt flushed with my successful control of my class, until something

unbelievable happened. When the train came within about five metres of them, they then executed a dare-devil crossing of the railway line in front of the approaching train. I was furious with them, but I didn't show it.

I walked back with them and told them to line up outside the classroom. I then chose a crime-fitting punishment that required the use of the leather strap.

"Hold your hand straight out. You know why you are getting the strap!" I told the whole class.

I regretfully strapped each student in turn. Not one child refused or complained about being strapped, confirming that they knew that they deserved the punishment. That day was the first and last day that I used the strap in that way.

The leather strap was an anomaly in the schools. Many teachers including myself had one, but nobody admitted to possessing one. It certainly wasn't issued as a standard teaching aide; the Teacher's College did not endorse it. But everyone was told that they needed one.

I remember the strap as a common teacher's accessory from my student years at Richmond Technical School. Corporal punishment was accepted as part of a student's education and students accepted "getting the strap" as a legitimate form of discipline, and perhaps they saw it as character building. Back in the mid-sixties the strap was used liberally. I remember being strapped six times on one

hand, the maximum recommended, not for talking in class but for listening to the student adjacent to me.

Before the strap was abolished sometime between 1983 and 1985, quite a few teachers used it as a class-control tool, especially in the year 9 classes, the toughest class in the toughest schools.

In 1976 I was sent to teach in what was known as a tough school, the infamous Northcote Technical School, a school where the use of the strap was almost obligatory. I too used the strap whilst I was teaching at Northcote Tech, but not in a way that you might think.

My next revelation about the education system cannot be proven in a court of law, nor in a teacher's tribunal, but on the balance of probability many teachers of ethnic backgrounds were gradually weeded out of the outer suburban schools and sent to inner suburban schools which had a greater percentage of ethnic students.

The administrators organising the relocation were raised and educated under the guidance of the White Australia policy. It was they, in their superior wisdom, who decided that teachers of ethnic background would better serve the needs of students from ethnic backgrounds. So me, being of ethnic background, was wisely sent to a tough school that had a greater proportion of ethnic students and surprise, surprise, a greater percentage of ethnic teachers as well. Northcote Tech harboured an amazing collection of multicultural teachers. Being sent to Northcote Tech was a blessing in disguise for me, as you will see later.

It is now February 1976. I was led by the ethnic principal of Northcote Technical School to the third floor where the maths teachers' office was located. As soon as the door opened I could literally feel the warm welcoming glow of the maths teachers. They all stood up, looked at me with glowing faces and said "Welcome". All of them were of an ethnic background. And three of them were recent arrivals to Australia, going by their strong Spanish accent, but they were not Spanish.

My first remark to my new colleagues was: "Is this the maths teachers' office or is it the United Nations office?"

It may as well have been the United Nations office as each person was introduced by name and by nationality. Antonio – Cuban, Oska – Cuban, Mercedes – Cuban, Eleny – Greek, Mahmoud – Egyptian, Felicity – Jewish, Lee – Singaporean, Nat – Polish and myself from Macedonia. And to complete the "ethnic decade", a trainee student by the name of Nick from a Dutch background was assigned to me for his classroom teaching practice at Northcote Tech.

The whole group of us worked and got on very well with one another. The teaching was very good, as all of us were well qualified in maths and science, especially two of the Cubans who had PhDs in chemistry.

The out-of-curriculum activities were even better, and since I am writing about multiculturalism rather than about teaching subject matter, I will describe some of those activities, starting with my experiences with Antonio.

Shortly after meeting Antonio, he asked me if I knew where he could buy a head. I asked him in return: “Why do you want to buy a head, you already have one?”

“No, no, I want to buy a heeaad,” he told me again.

After several repetitions of the word in various pronunciations and a description of the item I realised that he wanted to buy a shed, a tool shed. We both had a good laugh and from then on our friendship began to blossom. Eventually we became lifelong friends.

That was my blessing in disguise.

Now, one would think how could Antonio teach if he couldn’t pronounce the word “shed”, and above all how could he maintain classroom control with that strong Cuban-Spanish accent?

Well, his classes were as quiet as the State Library. He could freeze a student on the spot with his piercing eyes. And if a student dared to move or to object, Antonio would come up with “AEEE. BEGGG. YOURRR. PARDONNN”. And the student would just about soil his pants.

Antonio established himself as the king of classroom control and it wasn’t long before a humanities teacher who was recruited from America heard about Antonio’s class control. She came over for some hints about class discipline from Antonio. I was there when Antonio told Fay, the American teacher, to give the students a “warning” when they misbehaved. Fay went away happy and confident, now that she was armed with a new class control tactic.

But she came back to Antonio again and asked him: “What do I do after the fifth warning?”

Antonio replied: “I don’t know Fay, I have never been past the first warning.”

What he didn’t tell Fay, but he told me, was that you must never smile in the classroom. But unlike Antonio, I couldn’t hold a straight face in front of a student for long and I certainly couldn’t freeze a student with my piercing eyes like Antonio could. So I had to use the strap in order to maintain discipline in my classes. But I used the strap in a different way to the way other teachers did. By the way Antonio had no need for a strap.

Nick, the teacher whom I was mentoring during his teacher training, came and visited me at my home recently, about 47 years later. We reminisced about the days at Northcote Tech. By now, Nick has progressed with his teaching career since the Northcote Tech days. He is still teaching, but robotics at Swinburne University, not maths at a secondary school (there are no technical schools any more, only secondary colleges).

Nick appreciated my advice about not smiling in the classroom. He also liked my questioning of the student’s when they were late to class. The questioning went something like this: “Why are you late to class?”

“I missed the bus.”

“Why did you miss the bus?”

“I got up late.”

“Why did you get up late?”

“I went to bed late?”

“Why did you go to bed late?”

By now, the student would realise that he/she was responsible for coming late to school and he/she had no one else to blame but himself/herself. Nick relayed this method of questioning to his lecturer at the Teachers’ College and he told me that the college incorporated it into their curriculum.

Then Nick told me how impressed he was with my use of the strap as a discipline tool.

I purchased a custom-made leather strap from a saddlery in Blackburn. The leather strap was smooth on one side and it had the suede finish on the other side. On the smooth side I wrote the quadratic equation formula on it.

As part of his teacher training, Nick was invited to observe my method of disciplining students. This was a very rare occasion. One day one of my student’s misbehaved beyond my acceptable boundary of behaviour and thus needed to be put back in line, as it were.

I took him to my office. I told the student that he had a choice of writing one hundred lines with a single pen, not four pens strapped together, “I must not do...” whatever he did, or the option of taking the strap.

The culprit was hesitant, so I took out the strap. I showed him the quadratic formula that was written on the strap and told him that: “This will teach you a lesson.”

I laid the strap on the bench and I began pouring water onto the suede side of the strap. I heard a quiet voice asking: “Why are you pouring water on the strap, sir?

“To make it heavy so it will hurt more,” I replied.

This was torture, a slow form of punishment for the unruly student. I continued with my act, I took out a piece of chalk and placed it on the corner of my desk.

“Let me practise my strapping on the chalk,” I said.

And swoosh, the chalk turned into dust as the full weight of the strap came down on it. I turned around and I asked the victim: “The strap or the lines?”

A quivering voice said “Lines”.

And that was a relief for both of us.

That was the last time I used the strap and the last time I saw it. I don’t know what happened to it, but I wished I had kept it as a relic of torture from the past.

Antonio was the master of discipline, but he couldn’t match my observational skills when it came to finding out what mischief the students were up to. One of my observational skills was demonstrated one day when an ABC TV crew came to the school to film a documentary on a typical day at a disadvantaged (tough) school (Northcote

Tech). The camera crew left their equipment unattended as a gesture of trust and in no time at all a small camera went missing. The principal was notified and he ordered the school's exits closed and directed the teachers to search for the missing camera.

Antonio, who had experience with concentration camps in Cuba, said to me: “It’s time for a coffee, this will take ages.”

We went to our office on the third floor where we saw a student walking towards us with his arms crossed in front of him.

“Okay, I know you got it, just hand it over,” I instructed him.

He handed me the camera without any hesitation. I told the kid to go back to the school yard. I didn’t reprimand the student, as I felt the TV crew were negligent or too trusting. We had our coffee break first and then I returned the camera to the ABC TV crew without an explanation to them or to the principal.

Antonio was impressed with my sleuthing skill and he never found out that it was by pure chance that I asked that student for the camera.

Northcote Tech was a disadvantaged school, the children attending that school were from disadvantaged families. There was so much that I wanted to do for those poor students who were victims of their poverty-stricken families.

There were families that couldn't afford the cost of a school excursion. I could see the sadness in those poor kids' eyes as they looked at the excursion note that was posted on the notice board. I wanted to do something about those disadvantaged children who were yearning for an excursion, for a short and pleasant change from their sad lives.

I also wanted to open an after school social room within the school building for those and other children who loitered around the school waiting for their parents to come home late from work. I tried to set up an after school social area with a fridge and a pool table with the blessing of the school's principal. But there were so many obstacles in the way, an approval by the school council was required, health and safety requirements, the local council had to be notified, etc. I finally gave up and did what an existentialist would have done. I asked the principal for a list of students' names from extremely poor families. He dutifully provided a list of names and allowed Nick and myself to take them on an excursion.

Nick the trainee teacher and myself chose seven poor but willing students to come with us for a three-day adventure trip to north east Victoria with all expenses paid. They would go hiking and sightseeing at Mt Buffalo and at Falls Creek.

We set off in our private cars equipped with citizen's band radios for communication and drove to Benalla for lunch and a visit at the local gliding club. Next stop was at Brown Brothers Winery for a tour of their vineyard and

where we bought a bottle of wine for each of the student's parents as a gift for them (a bottle of Lexia at $1.00 each). We reached Mt Beauty where we stayed in my basic and not quite finished holiday house and where we cooked lamb chops and veggies for them.

One boy remarked: "This is the first time I've had steak."

Next day we went hiking around Lake Guy near the Bogong Village, where the lucky students were free to walk in and splash around in the crystal clear waters of the creeks feeding the lake. Unfortunately, one student jammed his foot between two large rocks and when he tried to free it he lost one of his runners, the fast-running water dragged the shoe into the lake. The poor kid started to cry. I told him: "It's okay, it's just a runner. That's nothing to cry about."

He told me that he borrowed the pair of runners from his brother and his brother will be very upset with him. On the way back to the house I bought him a pair of runners from the Op shop in Mt Beauty.

Most of the next day was taken up by driving along the twisty road to Mt Buffalo, which I enjoyed. The students enjoyed using the CB radio in turns, while they were urging Nick, who was driving his Holden Kingswood, to keep up with Mr Germantsis' Fiat 124 sports coupe.

The students enjoyed their first countryside trip. And at least one student enjoyed eating “steak” and Nick had an out-of-classroom student management experience.

I was pleased that I was able and allowed to give seven students a special holiday treat. I was also relieved that we were fortunate enough to come back to school without a mishap, especially when I was driving my Fiat 124 sports along those twisty dirt roads on Mt Buffalo. I was 30 years old then, Nick was probably 24 years old. And we were responsible for the health and safety of seven teenagers. We didn’t even take a first-aid kit with us; what was the principal thinking?

I guess he had faith in me or the technical school system was in turmoil. By 1977, the Education Department was still grappling with duty of care, its risk management, its working with children requirements and other issues dealing with equal opportunities (something labeled “affirmative action”). And the forthcoming changes to the curriculum, something labeled VCE, the Victorian Certificate of Education.

By now dark clouds were forming on the horizon and the tech schools were about to take the full brunt of the brewing storm. The first sign of the looming change to the educational system in Victoria appeared when some teachers were declared “in excess” of requirements.

The next chapter will continue with multiculturalism in schools as the traditional technical schools were laid to rest,

but not before an amazing extracurricular activity had taken place at the last remaining proper technical school.

And Another Thing

There is another thing I can say about teaching, and additionally this is not the last thing as far as the education system of Victoria if not all of Australia is concerned. It is just a small part, one part of many things that I observed during my time with the Education Department.

The vision of a man painting the main office of the Defence Standards Laboratories (DSL) back in 1972 where I worked still intrigues me. He had a degree in civil engineering and he was painting walls for a living. And that is because he liked painting, as someone pointed out to me.

Strangely enough I like painting and I like doing many other things as well, like engineering and explaining technical stuff. There was no career path in civil engineering via painting walls for that civil engineer at DSL. Similarly, I wasn't seeking a career in either teaching or in engineering through my involvement with schools, teachers and students. I was simply reacting to the environment that I found myself in, I was being an existentialist.

There were unforeseen benefits for me in not striving to advance my position up to the principal class. I wasn't enticed by the lure of extra remuneration that career advancement provides and I didn't have an egotistical need to advance my second-choice career beyond the classroom teacher. I was happy with teaching physics and maths. This was a huge academic and financial advancement for me. It was a quantum leap from herding sheep in Macedonia. So now I could sit back, observe and enjoy the social

interactions that went on at schools and I could participate in interesting extracurricular activities of my choice.

By now Antonio and I were very close friends, our friendship extended beyond school hours. And Nick, the student teacher, mastered the skill of teaching, which freed me of my obligations to him. Now an opportunity presented itself for me to make a beneficial change to my lifestyle within the schools and I was in the position to take advantage of it.

It all started when Northcote Tech announced that it had a teacher "in excess". I chose to declare myself in excess at Northcote Tech and I asked the principal to relocate me to Mitcham Technical School, which was no more than one kilometre away from my home. The benefits of this relocation were:

1. Closer to home, saving on transport costs and reducing travel time.

2. I would cycle to work for exercise and I could cycle home at lunchtime to see my baby daughter.

3. An opportunity to make new friends.

4. Mitcham Technical School had a good reputation and it was a fully functioning technical school with a well-equipped workshop, which made it an ideal school for technological projects.

The transition between the two schools was arranged and it went smoothly, but my reception at Mitcham Tech wasn't smooth and it was different to that at Northcote Tech. In fact, it was so different that it didn't leave a positive-memorable impression on me. I had a cold reception at Mitcham Tech, especially in the staff room where nobody looked up as I was introduced to the staff. I never entered that staff room again.

I kept warm, figuratively speaking, by the reunion at Mitcham Tech with my friend Aleko Papas, whom I met at our training school of Ringwood Tech and who is now another of those lifelong friends.

In due time, Aleko and I met a few other teachers who felt the cold ambience at Mitcham Tech and within a semester at the school we formed a group of teachers to stay warm with and to drink Turkish-style coffee as we socialised during morning recess.

The group consisted of Aleko Papas – Greek; Johannes Dajik – Dutch; Lee Ching – Malaysian; Xin Hong – Chinese; Ian (Major) Savic – Croatian; and George Harrison – he wasn't of an Anglo-Saxon background despite his name, he was Palestinian, but he insisted that he was a French Canadian. And of course there was me, the Macedonian who brewed the Turkish-style coffee every morning recess.

There were few other teachers of other ethnicities who kept to themselves, notably a physical education teacher from Macedonia who represented his country at the Olympics, another physical education teacher who played

soccer for the Dutch national team, and there was Orlando Aprila who persevered towards an impossible goal of becoming a school principal.

I say impossible because he didn't read the body language of the school administrators who were brought up during the reign of the White Australia policy, even though the White Australia policy was abolished by the time Orlando was striving towards his goal. The school and Education Department administrators could not adapt quickly enough to the workplace changes that were taking place during the late 70s and 80s. It takes generations to affect changes involving racial matters. Up to the age of his retirement, Orlando did not progress past level 6 (an automatic incremental promotion) classroom teacher. That is even though he had a university degree in chemistry and a diploma of education and he was bilingual. Having an Italian background impeded his career progress at Mitcham Tech.

Sadly, Orlando also missed out on drinking Turkish-style coffee with us and de-stressing during the Turkish coffee breaks because he sided with the ambitious group of teachers at Mitcham Tech. Destressing is what saved many of us from depression during the "high school and tech school" amalgamations and during the protracted and eventual closure of the technical schools.

Members of the Turkish coffee club still see each other and discuss such issues, long after our retirement from

teaching. The Turkish-style coffee club was therapeutic for us, the ethnics.

Several years went by, the Turkish coffee club survived, and it was still a mystery to the rest of the staff.

Meanwhile, the car park exhibited some interesting cars (mainly mine), which attracted the attention of an inquisitive trade teacher who happened to like interesting cars, and who was appropriately named Neil Wolseley (but not a descendent of the founder of the Wolseley motor car company).

That year the trade department decided to enter into a newly introduced car fuel-economy competition (dubbed the Shell Mileage Marathon) that was sponsored by the Shell motor oil company. The trade wing of the school sent Mr Wolseley to ask me, the driver of the interesting cars, if I could help with the design of a suitable car for the car fuel-economy competition.

The design and construction of an efficient, minimalist three-wheeled car was what I was waiting for. Needless to say, the car was completed in time for a run at Amaroo motor racing circuit in NSW. I calculated the required engine power and the gear ratios of the car that would be sufficient for it to perform to the specifications that were stipulated by the organisers of the event.

But I wanted to test the vehicle to make sure that it would be able to successfully complete the economy run. According to my calculations, the car with a 30 kg driver in it

had to attain a speed of at least 15 kph within a distance of 20 metres from a standing start to successfully complete the stipulated course in the specified time.

The only level surface of more than 20 metres in length that I could find was within the school buildings. The long corridor of the maths wing was an ideal test track for our entry into the Shell Mileage Marathon competition. The 30 cc two-stroke engine burst into life, the 30 kg driver opened the throttle of the engine and the car roared along the corridor at twice the required speed. The head of the maths department grumbled under his bushy beard that we disturbed his maths class. But he couldn't hide his green-with-envy facial expression. Everyone else was conspicuously silent or absent.

Somehow the secret got out and it found its way into the pages of the Herald-Sun newspaper. Next day a Shell oil company representative came to our school to congratulate the team.

A few days later I received a call from America via a physics teacher whom I knew and who taught at Camberwell Grammar during the teacher recruitment period. He informed me that our car project made it into the American evening news. The segment stated: Mitcham High School tested their racing car in the school's corridors (they made two errors, the class of school and the type of car).

Within a week a TV crew came to our school to film and to produce a short episode of this new extra-curricular

activity that was taking place at a technical school. The episode was shown on a television science program titled “What’s Out There?”. The participating students who were featured in the TV segment spoke enthusiastically about the project, without prior rehearsals.

This was how I wanted the project to evolve. This was a project of major educational benefit – five teachers and twenty students were involved, all with the blessing of the school council that funded the project. The school council also paid for the hire of a medium-sized bus and for the training of one of the staff members for his bus driver’s licence.

The bus driver got his licence, but he wasn’t taught how to drive a diesel-powered bus.

“Change into a higher gear now, don’t rev the engine,” I advised him.

“Huh, you think you know how to drive a bus now,” an ignorant teacher remarked.

“He is right, diesel engines don’t need to be revved,” replied Mr Wolseley.

This was a technologically important event and a serious undertaking by a school that was participating alongside formidable opponents such as the Ford Motor Company, several colleges of advanced education, some universities and many private enthusiasts, one of whom towed his amazing looking car all the way from WA. I was happy that we made it to the starting grid.

● MITCHAM Technical School students give their engine-less racing car a flying start with Peter Ellis, 13, (below) at the wheel.

Fuel miser in the corridor test

MITCHAM Technical School corridors can be pretty dangerous, especially when the school's racing car is on a test run inside.

While it doesn't look like the average racing car and weighs only 30 kg, it is an entrant in the private entry and secondary-class section of the Shell Mileage Marathon, to be held in Sydney on June 2.

It has three wheels, a brush-cutter engine and a tiny, 100 ml fuel tank and has been built entirely by 20 students from Year 8, 9, 10 and 11.

It will have a top speed of 30 kmh and a fuel efficiency rate of more than 100 miles a gallon.

The car will cost $1500 and has been financed by the school's council.

The race will be held at Amaroo, Sydney, on June 2 and entrants must complete 20 laps of the 700 metre circuit in 35 minutes at an average speed above 25 kmh.

The article in the Herald-Sun on 16 April 1985 about the students' entry in the Shell Mileage Marathon.

On the day of the run I walked with my two drivers around the racing track and showed them the path that they should follow during the run. The first corner might have needed braking, I thought to myself, but I instructed the drivers not to use the brake as this eats into the fuel consumption of the car.

“Approach the corner slowly, use the whole width of the track and accelerate slowly after the corner,” I said to them. To stress the point even further of not using the brake, I taped a sheet of A4 paper over the brake pedal and said to my number one driver: “I don’t want to see a footprint on the sheet of paper.”

The economy run was executed perfectly by young Peter Allis; he completed the run with twenty seconds to spare and recorded an amazing 401 MPG figure for fuel consumption. Mathew, the second driver, who was transported to the venue independently by his father, was given an unofficial run and completed it within the allocated time and probably recorded a better fuel consumption than what our number one driver did. Mathew was thrilled with that. We could not have done any better.

We returned back to school triumphant with a Best Inaugural Team trophy and $250.00 in prize money. The first teacher to congratulate me on running the event was the one who questioned my know-how about the diesel bus.

The reception back at school was as cold as the South Pole. The administrators and the humanities department

ignored us. They thought that we went on a personal adventure (they were partly right, at least as far as I was concerned); one staff member asked if we enjoyed our personal trip to NSW.

The trade teachers on the other hand couldn't hide their disappointment that the science department hijacked a trade department project and completed it successfully. Nobody spoke to us about the event, but they immediately started designing the next year's entry.

The principal of the school, who had not spoken to me for six years and now he had a good reason to say something to me, chose silence instead of praise. That was his way of praising teachers, I took his silence as a compliment. The principal's deputy had a go at me but stumbled over her feet (more about this later).

As soon as we came back from the Amaroo racing track, I heard that a group of electric car enthusiasts had formed the Electric Vehicle Association of Victoria and organised a race for home-made battery-powered cars to be held at the VFL Park in June 1986. The Shell Mileage Marathon car was ideal for this competition. All we had to do was to fit a 12 kg lead-acid battery into our car and to exchange the petrol engine with an electric motor.

By June 1986 the electric battery powered car was on the starting grid, ready for a two hour Formula 1 style race on a track mapped out on the VFL's car park in Glen Waverley.

Students convert car to electric

MITCHAM Technical School's electric car, converted from petrol operation in only four weeks, competed in the recent two hours "Electrathon" event at VFL Park, Waverley.

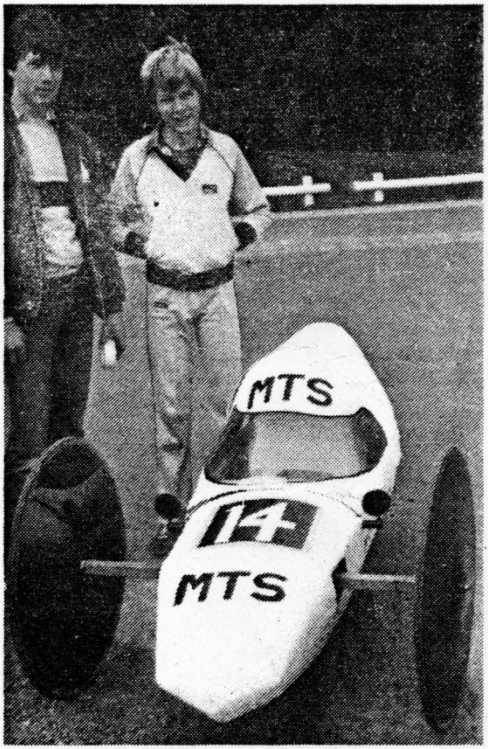
The vehicle, driven by student Anthony Horsnaill with pit crew member Warren Honey, was built by 14 students with the help of science teacher Mr Olie Germantsis.

It was racing in about third place against a field of 16 electric vehicles when it encountered battery problems after 57 laps, having lost a tyre in the ninth lap. The winning electric car completed 125 laps in two hours.

Mitcham Tech's car had a petrol engine when it competed in the mileage marathon in Sydney in July where it won an outstanding first entry award.

The recent Electrathon was conducted by the Australian Electric Vehicle Association.

Mr Germantsis said the conversion from petrol was carried out after hours of work by all the boys involved.



DRIVER Anthony Horsnaill (right) stands proudly beside the Mitcham Tech car with pit crew member Warren Honey.

People interested in electric vehicles should contact the AVEA secretary, Mr J. Hill, on 570 5261.

A local newspaper article about the students' entry in the Electrathon electric car race.

Mitcham Tech's car started well and was leading the competition for the first hour until it started to slow down at a concerning rate and it eventually came to a halt. The battery ran out of Coulombs (electrical charge).

Unbeknown to me, new batteries need to go through a charging and discharging cycle to get the maximum energy out of them. Our small team gained valuable experience about electrically powered cars.

Back at school, the battery-powered car project was ignored again by the academics and was shunned by the tradies who vowed to build their own Shell Mileage Marathon car. The administrators on the other hand were preoccupied with the impending amalgamation of the tech school with its sister high school and had no time for our battery-powered car.

After the unappreciated work that I put into the car projects, I distanced myself from the extracurricular activity and concentrated on inner school activities which included introducing cycling as a sports option for the students.

I love coincidences and this coincidence involving cycling, a car and a hatchet is extra special as it showcased my apparent ability of diffusing dangerously violent situations.

Whilst I was riding with the cycling sports group on the streets around the surrounding suburbs of Mitcham, I saw an abandoned car in the backyard of a house in Blackburn. It was a convertible Triumph Herald in original condition

(these cars are collectable now). After school, on my way home I purchased the car at a bargain price of $50.00 and drove it home to include it in my car collection.

But I lost interest in the car and I offered it to one of my cycling students, Michael Schuman, at the same bargain price of $50.00. Michael and I rode two-abreast during the sports activity and spoke enthusiastically about his future plans regarding the Triumph Herald. Those discussions formed a trusting relationship between us. That trusting relationship was put to the test one day in the school yard.

I was on yard duty when a riot started at the far end of the school yard. Students were chanting and two teachers were rushing to the scene where a student was wielding a hatchet and was cutting down small potted trees. The two teachers were directing the students away from the violent scene. The teachers appeared startled and warned everyone to stay away.

I saw that the culprit was Michael, who was menacingly wielding the hatchet. I walked up to him and calmly asked him to give me the weapon.

“Give me the axe, Michael,” I said.

Michael handed me the hatchet as if he was giving me a piece of his birthday cake. The tense situation calmed down and there was an air of disbelief as Michael and I walked two-abreast towards the vice principal’s office. The other two teachers were stunned by the way I diffused the situation and how I calmed a distressed student.

That day Michael couldn't hold his rage after he found out that his parents had divorced.

Academic and sporting activities at Mitcham Tech settled down to normal again. And then I was summoned to the vice principal's office for what I thought might be a delayed congratulatory appraisal for either the Shell Mileage Marathon car project, the electric car project, the cycling sports activity, or the disarming of the armed student.

But no, I was invited to the vice principal's office for a mysterious interrogation. The vice principal positioned herself on a high chair and offered a low stool at her feet for me to seat on. This is a standard intermediating method used to intimidate students.

Mrs Blueberry looked like a character from a Charles Dickens novel who was reading a book by the fireside, the only things missing were a cat on her lap and a blanket covering her legs. She began interrogating me in a deceivingly casual way. She had taken the customary approach of interrogation that was used in shaming petty criminals in Charles Dickens's era. Mrs Blueberry began with the usual customary complementary statements.

1. "You know that as a professional teacher, you have responsibilities."

2. "The school has set-working hours."

3. “You are well paid and you are required to reflect this by your actions.”

I answered yes to all three statements. The vice principal lost her train of thought and forgot the next statement, she tripped over her own feet. And then, with a gentle nod of her chin ended the futile interrogation. I still had a few more “yeses” left to reply with. But Mrs Blueberry didn’t expect such compliance and the interrogation came to an end. I left her room confused and disappointed that she did not praise me for my extracurricular activities.

Back at the Turkish coffee destressing hub I related my confrontation with Mrs Blueberry to Aleko, who immediately cleared the bizarre mystery. He told me that the previous day he was seen leaving the school early and that I must have been mistaken for him. Aleko and I are not twins, there is a substantial physical difference between us. But I understand the mistaken identity, the informant would have told Mrs Blueberry that “one of the Greeks absconded”.

There are so many more examples that I can tell you that are based on prejudice, but I will describe the most blatant examples of pre-judgements that I observed and then I will close this chapter.

At the beginning of 1987, I volunteered to go to Burwood Technical School. It was the last stand-alone tech school and there I met a scruffy looking trade teacher who was full of anger and was not afraid to express it. His name was Robert Butcher. He was a carpenter by trade, but he

taught a maths-based subject that hardly anybody understood including the maths teachers. He taught 'solid geometry'. I saw something of myself in him. We both came from a poor background. He told me that he used to hunt rabbits for food around Hobson Bay when Hobson Bay was open farmland. He showed me how to cook rabbit terrine. From then on I socialised with Butch, as he liked to be referred to.

And then one day Mrs Bloomfield, a teacher from the humanities department who lives in Surrey Hills and whose daughter is a dancer in the Melbourne Ballet Company, approached me. Mrs Bloomfield, who was at the top-end of the social scale, asked me: “How can you socialise with that feral person?”

I gave her a true assessment of Robert. I told her that: “Mr Butcher might look a bit rough around the edges, but he has a heart of gold. I have seen how he treats his wife and his two daughters,” I explained to Mrs Bloomfield.

Well now, you have to imagine the “Toyota ad” where a person jumps, clicks his feet together and says “Oh What A Feeling” to visualise the next scene. Picture Mrs Bloomfield skipping away with delight and I could just faintly hear her telling a colleague of hers: “Olie said that Robert Butcher has a heart of gold.”

Are people like Mrs Bloomfield for real? Yes, they are real and that’s why we have prejudice, and that’s because one person judges another person relative to his frame of

social reference. I bet Einstein could have formed a "prejudice" equation for this human trait.

Butch on the other hand returned my compliment when the head of the science department of Burwood Tech, who thought that he was as smart as Einstein, because he drank his coffee from a beaker, asked Butch "Why do you hang around with that wog?"

Butch answered thus: "Because I like him and that he is smart."

I was horrified at observing acts of prejudice at Burwood Tech for the next three years before it closed down without amalgamating with a neighbouring high school. By now the tech school students were out of control, their educational future was uncertain, and corporal punishment was replaced with a form of collaborative agreement between teachers and students that students couldn't understand and therefore the discipline method did not work.

Evidence of students being out of control was not hard to see. A one-eyed person could see it. I saw one act when Mrs Bloomfield was skipping with joy along the corridor. I managed to get a glimpse of a teacher's hair on fire in an adjacent science room. Felicity, the teacher from Northcote Tech, was now transferred to Burwood Tech to have her hair charred by an out-of-control student.

Teachers had no effective method of controlling students and they didn't have the support of parents. One

mother by the name of Mrs Murphy came to me for a parent-teacher interview regarding her son, named Taylor, to bluntly tell me that I could not control the class that her diligent son was in.

“Taylor says that you can’t control your classes, Mr Gee errr mant sus.”

“Yes, you are absolutely right, Mrs Murphy. But it is Taylor who is the most disobedient student in my class. Could you please help me, Mrs Murphy, and tell me how you control Taylor at home?”

Mrs Murphy stood and left before I finished my question.

Oh, how I wished I was back at Northcote Tech where parents of ethnic backgrounds would come and ask “Is Johnny good?”

“Yes, Johnny is very good.”

“If Johnny is no good, you smack at school, I smack at home. No more problems with Johnny.”

The technical school era that started in 1873 came to a regretful end in 1992. A new and undefined educational era was now emerging. And then I was “exiled” (exiled is not quite the right word, next chapter will deal with this) to a genuine secondary college which made my parents proud of me. Because now they could tell their peers that their son is a “college professor”.

Before I went to Brentwood Secondary College, and where I encountered a different form of prejudice, which will be described shortly, I wrote a poem to mark the end of the technical school era. And then I asked “Einstein” to read it out to the school staff because of his clearer Aussie accent.

THE OLD TECH

Where are your sons?

The ones you took to your heart

And shaped and formed with

A loving heart and a firm hand

Call out to them, in this your hour of need

Don’t lay down and pass unnoticed

You have put this nation on its feet

In oil-stained rooms you have toiled

In rooms full of sawdust you have

Perfected their skills

Memories linger on, a whole army of

Skilled workers were spawned from your soul

No false men, in fancy clothes making megadeals

With non-existent companies

Your sons earn their meal by the sweat

Of their brow and the skill of their hand

Don’t leave us in despair

For we need honest men

Men forged, shaped and honed to serve our nation

Go now, we are not afraid, we know you

Will be back again.

A Side Step To A Secondary College

I finally made it into my colleagues' future. I had to go back to the past to reach the year 1990 AD, which is really the present. Let me explain.

Here I am back in the year 1972 at Defence Standards Laboratories (DSL) and I am explaining to Mr Thomson and to Mr Johnson that it's not that I can't see the difference between you, it's that I don't know which body belongs to which name.

Professionals at DSL were addressed by their surnames even when they went out for a counter lunch at the Anglers Tavern, which is set on the banks of the Maribyrnong River. There, we would order our counter lunch, usually a T-bone steak with an egg and a salad and we would give our names to the girls behind the counter. When the steak with an egg was ready, the girl at the counter would call out the name over the tavern's PA system. "T-bone steak for Mr Johnson."

The fishermen on the opposite riverbank knew what Mr Johnson was having for lunch that day. Mr Johnson would walk to the counter and take his well-done steak.

When my steak was ready, the PA system would break into a static crackle. "T-bone steak for Mr Jer…., Mr Geee…rrr, Mr Germm…t…sss."

By then I knew that my steak was ready. So I went and picked it up amid a roar of laughter that was directed towards me. Everyone was looking at me, not at the girl who couldn't pronounce my name. I don't blame the

serving girl because she probably never had to call out an ethnic name before. I was the only ethnic at the tavern that day and the only ethnic at DSL.

Next Friday it was different, I changed my surname, I gave myself a trendy name. “T-bone steak for Mr Concorde,” the PA system reverberated clearly without static. I walked up to the counter and picked up my medium-rare steak with egg in complete silence, thanks to “Concorde, the supersonic jet” that was in the news almost every day during those times.

All of those people at DSL who were in their mid-twenties and whose names were ending in “son” were buying land to build their AV Jennings homes in Glen Waverley. The ethnics on the other hand were buying land in Doncaster to build their homes by Bruno Grollo. I went somewhere in between and bought an established house in Blackburn that had been designed by Robin Boyd. The house came with fully grown trees and all the built-in fixtures ready for us to move in. Today Glen Waverley is inhabited by those people whose names ended with a “son”.

Between 1990 and 2002 I was teaching students at Brentwood Secondary College whose names ended with a “son”. Except for one charming boy of an Indian background who couldn’t stop talking in my class. I developed a trusting relationship with him and one day he confided in me that he felt uncomfortable when he was dropped off at the school yard by his father in their family late model Bentley motor

car. Because of the Bentley the kids were picking on him, he told me. I told Taij to tell his father to drop him away from the school grounds from then on. Problem solved, admittedly in a different way to the way problems were solved at Northcote Tech for example.

Every problem has its unique solution. Mrs Jones wanted to know why the Education Department employed a teacher who couldn't speak English. So she came to see me during the parent-teacher interviews to find out. I was tipped off about this encounter by the vice principal.

"Good afternoon, Mrs Jones, please take a seat. Just before we start to discuss Jake's progress in maths, can you tell me if my speech is clear enough to you?"

Mrs Jones understood my question and the intent of my question. She stood up and left the interview before she could sit down. Jake was in for a good explanation to his mother that afternoon.

My introduction and my acceptance at Brentwood Secondary College were lukewarm, a polite "Hi" whilst looking down at the floor is all I heard. Nobody offered a welcoming hand shake. The atmosphere in the science office was what a rabbit in a corner of a pet shop full of dogs would feel.

There was a vacant corner for me in the science office, but I didn't take it. One corner was occupied by an ethnic Egyptian and the other corner by an ethnic Lebanese. I

moved into the maths office and there I found a smart but strange friend to socialise with.

She was taller than me and she wanted to be even taller than that. She wore an old fashioned skirt that looked like a Venetian blind hanging vertically on her. One day she forgot her lunch at home and her elderly father brought the sandwich to her office. She was strange; smart people are strange. When Agatha was farewelled from Brentwood, she thanked me for being the only person who spoke to her in a friendly way.

I managed to survive and then I thrived at Brentwood for 13 long years by involving myself in extracurricular activities. I will list some of those activities for the record and then I will move on to the more personal social interactions:

1. Hybrid car: Human powered and battery powered; ran at the Energy Breakthrough, Maryborough, Victoria.

2. Hybrid car: Human powered and petrol powered; ran at the Energy Breakthrough.

3. Nine years with solar-powered model cars; competing across Australia.

4. Building and launching miniature rockets.

5. Introduction of robotics.

I felt that I was slowly converting the ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) focused school into a type of technological school. I was being an existentialist; I did what I wanted to do and I said what I wanted to say with impunity.

One of the things I did was to rejuvenate the forlorn soccer team that was run by a disinterested geography teacher. One day I saw her with her head buried in her lessons-preparation work, while thirty or more boys were kicking a soccer ball aimlessly around the school oval. Next Wednesday ten boys were eliminated from the team for not running fast enough around the oval. A teacher came up to me and he said that he was impressed with my training method.

Then the PE teacher brought a kid to the soccer pitch and she told me that he was a “gun” at soccer and he was – he played for a local soccer team. The “soccer-gun” could take the ball from centre midfield all the way to the goal square through a bunch of defenders and put the ball in the net. I was impressed, but I threatened him with expulsion from the team.

“Mustafa, if you don’t pass the ball to other players, you will be kicked out of the team.”

Mustafa brought his cousin Ahmet next Wednesday to pass the ball to. And now we had a team that was good enough to play against other schools.

The following year a new teacher came to the school who knew far more than I did about soccer. He played the game as a school boy. The only ball that I kicked was the blown-up bladder of our pig back in Macedonia. Having two teachers interested in soccer gave me the time to start a girls soccer team. This was unheard of in the land of the VFL football stadium in Glen Waverley.

The girls had to be told not to pass the ball to their friends, who were in the opposing team. There was a soccer gun in the girls' team as well, but when it came to striking a goal, she would pass the ball to her friend, the goalkeeper of the opposition.

"No, no, you don't pass the ball to the goalie, you kick the ball into the soccer net," I shouted.

The next extracurricular activity was completely different from soccer or from cars. This activity was conducted on the snow, it involved a biathlon skier and a group of thirty novice skiers, the making of a lifelong friend and unintentionally making the vice principal uncomfortable.

Although Glen Waverley is a wealthier suburb than Northcote, there were some families in Glen Waverley that couldn't afford to send their child on a trip to America. The poster read: "Come and say Good day U.S.A for $2,000 dollars."

My handwritten poster read: "Have fun in the snow for $17 dollars." The emphasis was on a low-cost trip.

The ski hire was arranged at Marysville ski hire. Nat, the proprietor, threw in a free ski lesson for thirty students. The bus was booked; I think the school council paid for the bus hire. The vice principal asked me to brief the students before the trip and she sat and listened to my briefing.

“Wear normal but warm clothing, bring a beanie and gloves (not dish-washing gloves) and sunglasses, but nothing special. You don’t need snow boots, ski boots will be provided, and bring your lunch,” I instructed the would-be skiers.

The vice principal was aghast with my unprofessional briefing. She was the one who, one day at the outdoor swimming sports, pointed out to me that I was incorrectly attired.

“Oh, Olie, do you know that that’s not the correct umbrella for a sunny day?”

Oh, dear, I used a black rain umbrella to shield the sun, oh what a misdemeanour.

At Lake Mountain Alpine Resort mother nature was kind to us. She provided a blanket of fresh snow to match the perfect sunny day. All of the students were shown how to execute a snow plough by Nat’s ski instructor, all except for Eleanor, the vice principal, who came too late for the lesson. That’s because she was busy fitting herself into her biathlon ski suit which had Ken Done livery splashed all over it. The only thing missing was the rifle.

After a quick lunch the skiers shuffled their way up along a steep incline to an area named “Helicopter Flat” where a string of ski trails fans out. We decided to take the easiest and shortest trail that leads back to the car park. We skied to a wide flat area with pristine snow, the ideal place for snow play.

“Unclip your skis and have fun in the snow,” I told the kids, and I left them there under the supervision of the other teacher. I skied back to look for the biathlon skier.

Thank God she wore her Ken Done outfit, it made her stand out like a rosella against the white background of the wrong trail that she was on. We shuffled back to our private snow play area without talking or looking at one another. Eleanor continued to shuffle all the way back to the car park.

I can’t believe how everything ran like clockwork that day, the kids filed into the bus and sat as quiet as mice. We returned to Nat's ski hire shop in Marysville and each kid graciously thanked Nat for a great day in the snow. Nat dubbed us the “Brentwood ski team”. Nat and I became life-long friends from then on, I still drop in to see Nat when I go skiing at Lake Mountain.

Meanwhile the biathlon skier sat at an outdoor table of the closed coffee shop next to Nat’s shop with her back facing us. I think she was humiliated by virtue of her own pre-judgement (prejudice). I assumed she was thinking: how could this ethnic, who looked like he should be driving taxis,

take a group of students on a ski trip and exercise complete control over them?

Little did she know that this ethnic had a holiday house that he built with his own hands at the foothills of Falls Creek, and that he skied there as well as at Lake Mountain. Little did she know that this taxi driver look-alike competed in last year's Kangaroo Hoppet, a cross-country ski race at Falls Creek.

That's what prejudice is about; judging a person according to what you know about that person's ethnic group. Don't worry, we are all guilty of prejudice because we are all ignorant of some things.

Now it's time to roast the principal, well, the most recent principal of Brentwood Secondary College, that is. Principals at secondary schools change on the average every three years. Ambitious teachers step on a conveyor belt that eventually takes them up to the "principal class", hopefully at least two years prior to their retirement age so that they can retire on a super fund that is seven times their annual salary (averaged over their last two years). This is a great financial benefit for those who are that way inclined. If a teacher achieves that goal, he/she can holiday in the south of France once a year and tell everyone there what a great success he/she has been. The principal at Brentwood was on the last few rungs of the conveyor belt, having started from the low rung as a primary school teacher.

During 1991 a tragedy occurred in my family. My father passed away at an early age. I approached the principal and

I told him, I didn't ask him, I told him that I needed a week off from teaching for my father's funeral arrangements. Do you know what he said? There was no mention of condolences by the way.

"According to the gazetted teachers' work agreements, you are entitled to three days for bereavement," he informed me.

That's what principals do. They point out the rules of employment. Principals know the rules, they know which boxes to tick.

"Bring me a resignation form and I will sign it right now," I shouted at him.

Do you know what he did then? Well, you won't believe it, because I didn't believe it myself until a week later when he told me face to face. I walked away from the school and returned a week later without signing a resignation form because he didn't produce one.

The funeral was held in the Macedonian Orthodox Church in Young Street Fitzroy, the same church that I was married in. It was a small church and it was overflowing with relatives, friends and mates and, unbeknown to me, the principal of Brentwood Secondary College.

Monday week the principal runs up to me and speaks.

"I went to your father's funeral and I was amazed at the service, it went on for over an hour and I didn't hear a

word of English spoken during the whole service. You are really living two lives," he told me.

The principal confirmed that I and many other ethnics were living in a type of a parallel universe, an imaginary universe perhaps, one that we slipped into at appropriate times.

When at times I walk past a restaurant with darkened windows and I see an image of myself and at the same time the restaurant patrons see the real me, I wonder if the patron's sense of me is the same as the image I see. I think not, as the next brief story shows.

I was in the Maths office of Brentwood Secondary College at the time of report writing. I was shuffling through the dictionary pages to check the correct spelling for my students' reports. The head of the Maths department was looking at me with a sense of superiority, you know what I mean. He had his hand on his chin and his head slightly tilted, his long thin body in a gentle "S" shape and a "I-feel-sorry-for-you-look" on his face.

Brentwood, as other schools in Victoria whose main objective was to prepare students to attain the highest ATAR score, informed the parents of that fact via comprehensively written reports. Brentwood had a system of proofreading the reports by a colleague chosen at random before the reports were sent out. By chance I was chosen to check Maxine's reports, the head of the English department who was a notorious perfectionist. The head of

the Maths department handed me Maxine's reports and smugly uttered the words: "Good luck with that, Olie."

Next morning Maxine received her corrected reports and by late afternoon she delivered my reports and presented me with an expensive bottle of red wine in the presence of the head of the Maths department.

"Thank you for the thorough checking of my reports, Olie, I appreciate your help."

The head of Maths dropped his jaw and his sense of his superiority was truncated by half that day, his body took on the shape of an elongated question mark. There was no need for me to tell him that my daughter Stephanie, who was in year 12 then, corrected Maxine's reports.

Other accolades followed. Firstly, from the principal who by now was at the end of the conveyor belt. He handed me a glowing "open reference" before he left the school. Eleanor, still not looking directly at me, handed me two 'thank you notes' from the parents whose kids had "fun in the snow". A parent whose son won the "bridge building competition at Monash University Engineering Department" thanked me thus: "Mathew won the bridge building competition because of the engineering knowledge he picked up from you during the solar car competitions."

Another parent whose son participated in the hybrid car events thanked me for inspiring his son to study aerospace engineering.

The most touching compliment of all came from Hino, a student of Balkan background who accompanied me on several interstate model solar car competitions. And who was the dux of the school. I met him at the bank queue two years after he left the school.

“How are you going, Hino?” I enquired.

“I am in my second year of medicine, sir. I am doing it for my parents, but when I finish I will do engineering because of you.”

It has been 20 years since I retired from formal teaching. Prior to my retirement, 28 of my years were taken up by secondary schools. If I count the eight years that I taught part time at an independent special school, teaching what we termed “kids at risk”, it would add up to 36 years of being involved with children. Job satisfaction during all of that time was subjective, and difficult to quantify.

Teachers who have dedicated their energy and applied their specific knowledge in preparing the next generation of the workforce need greater recognition by the community. The few accolades that teachers receive from some students, from some parents and from a few colleagues, are warmly welcomed; teachers don’t ask for more than the opportunity to influence and inspire their students to learn.

Not all of the students that I taught went on to study physics, maths or engineering. One student was grateful for a reference that I wrote for him; the reference gained him a job as a security officer. Leo came to my home one day to

thank me personally for the opportunity my reference afforded him. My number one driver of the Shell Mileage Marathon car became a plumber and followed in his father's trade. Sure, there were other students who went on and studied engineering, including my two children, but I didn't teach any of them; I inspired them to study; they did the hard work themselves, they did "the heavy lifting" as it were.

The most unlikely student who was inspired to study engineering was Maya. And this happened at the independent special school of Berry Street Victoria. This school accepted students who were barred from attending mainstream schools due to their violent behaviour and drug addiction. One day, Maya told me that she wanted to be a motor mechanic for a Grand Prix motor racing team. My answer to her statement was direct and straight to the point.

"They won't even look at you unless you have an Engineering Degree."

"Okay, I will do engineering," she told me.

Maya was assigned to me; the only maths and science teacher in the school to teach her maths and physics in preparation for her to complete the VCE at TAFE. Six years later Maya returned to the Berry Street School with an Engineering Degree. Not only had she attained a university degree, she got her confidence back. Maya walked into the school wearing a tracksuit, sneakers, her hair was flowing naturally over her shoulders, there was no make-up on her

face or mascara on her eyelashes, and no exposed belly button with jewellery in it. Maya was empowered by the knowledge she gained, she was proud, and yet she looked humble as she said a simple “Thank you” to the school that started in a factory in Noble Park.

What inspired Maya to study engineering of all things, one might ask? Nothing more than a discussion about racing cars!

I have said enough about my teaching career, which wasn’t my original intention, and now I realise that I have moved away from the theme of this book. The theme of adjusting to the social life in this new country, that to me it looked like it was in a parallel universe.

Now, as I was pondering how to bring this book to a logical and cohesive conclusion, I remembered one day when the phone rang. It was my sister Silvi on the other end of the phone line who informed me that she and her daughter Penny had organised a trip to Western Australia. We were going to visit mum’s two younger sisters who are now approaching 90 years of age. One sister lives in Perth, the other lives in Manjimup. To keep this story short, I will talk about the sister who lives in Manjimup, as this sister together with her husband have isolated themselves and live in their own universe. And thus their story is relevant to the theme of this book.

Penny purchased three airline tickets and booked a motel in Perth for the three of us. All I had to do was call an Uber and be at the departure lounge of Tullamarine Airport

at least one hour before the flight; this is the type of trip that I like, one that is organised by someone else.

We landed at the Perth airport in the afternoon and found the motel before dusk; all of this was a normal touristy fair. Next day we did more touristy stuff: like having breakfast on the balcony of the motel overlooking Kings Park, and a walk around Elizabeth Quay. At the Quay, the two ladies participated in the obligatory task of souvenir gazing.

I stood at the pier and reminisced about an earlier trip to Rottnest Island that I and my young family enjoyed some 40 years ago. Forty years ago the ferry trip to Rottnest Island seemed like a long trip and an amazing adventure. Now, that stretch of water looks like a hop, step and a jump. My sentiment was confirmed by my cousin Chrissie, the mother of a physiotherapist. Later on, in Manjimup Chrissie told me that her daughter, who is a physically fit physiotherapist, swam the 19 km stretch of water between the Perth coast and the island. It seems that distances shrink with the passage of time in Western Australia, particularly in Manjimup.

Next day at precisely 4.00 am, Chrissie, the mother of the Rottnest swimmer, distorted the space-time continuum and picked us up and drove us very slowly back in time to her parents' farm in Manjimup. She could have driven us back to our village in Macedonia as far as I was concerned. Not true, but it's easy to imagine if you change a few elements. Replace the gum trees with fruit trees, imagine a

snow capped mountain, add a score of sheep and you are in Mala, Macedonia, back in 1952.

Chrissie parked the car in the machinery shed next to her father's tractor and escorted us to the small weatherboard house that I saw for the first time 40 years ago. *Tetin* (uncle) Risto was waiting at the farm gate to receive us like royal guests. He was dressed in a suit and he looked very uncomfortable; a 90 year old farmer who spent 70 of those years on the land doesn't look comfortable in a suit. His cast iron hands, his sunburned face with cracked lips were sure signs of hard work on the land.

Lunch was ready for us to partake; this is easy to say, but I know it had taken *Teta* (aunt) Ristana, mum's youngest sister, all morning to prepare the lunch in her wood fired stove. Almost everything on the dining table was farm produce.

After lunch, *Tetin* Risto changed into his farm clothes and he gave me a tour of his paradise. He told me that his father bought the 35 acre plot of land from a returned soldier who obtained the land via the Returned Soldiers Settlement Act, but the soldier couldn't produce anything from the land and thus he sold it to *Tetin* Risto's father. During the 70 plus years on the land, *Tetin* tried everything from milking cows, growing tobacco, growing onions and finally settled on raising cattle.

Oh yes, he grows his own vegetables and keeps chickens for eggs and meat. One thing that he didn't tell me, but it was evident from his actions, was that he lost his

sense of “the passage of time” – he had no plans of slowing down and certainly not retiring as confirmed by his recent purchase of a young bull and the installation of a huge rainwater tank.

What kept and is still holding these immigrants from Macedonia on this desolate farm for so long, I wondered? There wasn’t much to see on the farm; just flat land, two dams, a shed, the new rainwater tank and 30 head of cattle (the newly purchased bull had not arrived yet). I sort of know what keeps my *Tetin* and *Teta* on this harsh land, but I don’t know how to express it in words. I saw the answer to my question on both of them. First on *Teta’s* beaming face when she brought the pastry out of her woodfired stove that was heated by fire wood from a neighbouring farm. I saw it on *Tetin* when he was watering his vegetable garden. He stood firm and straight on his own land, full of confidence and beaming with pride that he had the knowledge of the land. Just then I saw flashes of Maya, full with pride, alongside my *Tetin*, but with a different knowledge and in her own individual universe.

Extrapolating my flashes of Maya to single individuals, one can conclude that everyone on Earth lives in their own universe.

Next morning we left mum's sister and her husband in Manjimup/Macedonia in their sustainable universe and headed for Perth and later on for Melbourne, both of which are in a decadent universe.

At ten thousand metres above Australia, flying over the Great Australian Bight, I pondered about the amount of fuel the plane was burning and how much of that was contributing to global warming. Climate scientists have not reached consensus on the contribution that fossil fuel makes towards climate change. But *Tetin* Risto knows how much the climate has changed and he did something about it; he installed a rainwater tank. Farmers like *Tetin* Risto know that the Earth is suffering because they talk to the Earth; they do this by touching the Earth's soil with their bare hands. We are grateful to the scientists for alerting us to the Earth's plight, but we must ask the farmers to tell us what the Earth needs. And we must learn to speak with the Earth, even if it takes us 70 years.

Referring back to my chapter on "Searching For The Elusive True Blue Aussie", I have found the ideal true blue Aussie and that is the one who looks after the Australian land, including a couple who migrated from Macedonia and have been caring for a piece of Australian land in Manjimup for more than 70 years.

An Aussie In A Parallel Universe is full of entertaining and insightful stories about an immigrant Macedonian boy discovering Australian culture as he tries to fit in and find the "true blue Aussie". The interesting anecdotes continue as he grows up and finds friendship, love and a career. But his two universes are still parallel when he finds his calling as a teacher, meets a wide range of other teachers, parents and students, and discovers that inspiring students and young Aussies is not about memorizing facts and figures but about involving them in practical and sometimes extracurricular learning activities.

An Aussie In A Parallel Universe

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